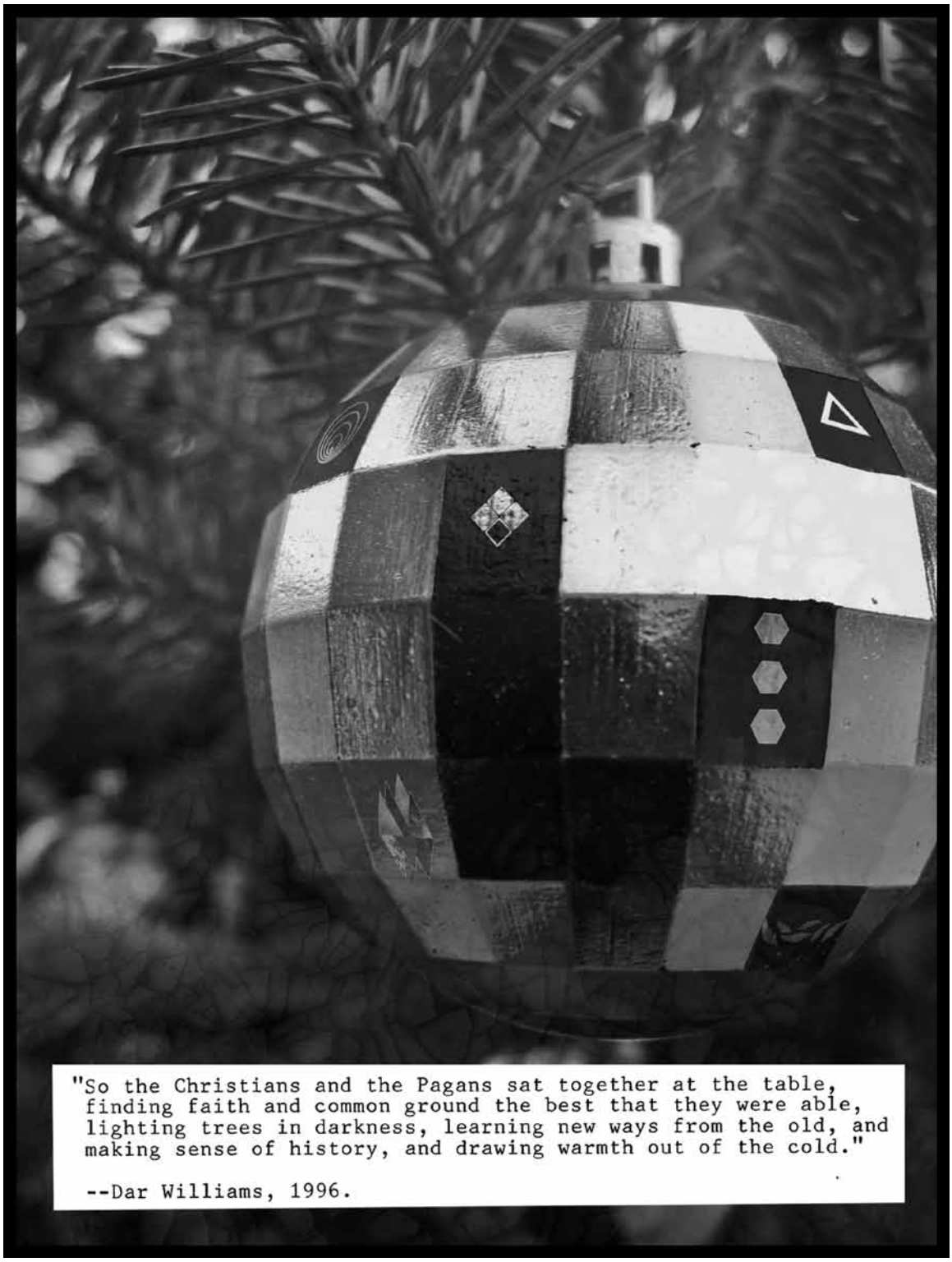
The Cenacle

Number 106 | December 2018



"So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table,
finding faith and common ground the best that they were able,
lighting trees in darkness, learning new ways from the old, and
making sense of history, and drawing warmth out of the cold."

--Dar Williams, 1996.

December 27, 2018
On board Downtown
Crossing to Harvard
redline (T)

— Crossing Longfellow Bridge in late December & the Charles River not close to frozen. To be sure: it's cold, low 30s°F. But not that cold. Some Boston winters are like this. Maybe feet of snow will come in January or later; it's a long winter.

Happy Season of Lights! :)

My version of all those various holiday greetings & traditions. Christmas, Hanukah, Solstice, Kwanzaa, & others. Many others.

Harvard Square
Smith Center foyer
my table
Cambridge, MA.

— Many others. And I can't name them all. The more-well-known & less-well-known & come & gone markings or celebrations or even dirges about

the ending time of a calendar year. And how many human calendars have there been over time? All marking the passage of days, seasons, lives.

Happy Season of Lights! :)

That's my phrase for it, how I explained it to myself when younger, brought up in a home of two religions, neither of which I was trained in.

And since there was no agreement on matters like God & my family had its own difficult differences with those around it in a white, suburban New England town, I became acutely tuned in to the idea of difference while still a boy.

Difference while young can be bad. Different in income, clothes, manners, knowledge, body, self-acceptance, self-confidence, stacks a subtle poison through one's days, never good enough, smart enough, attractive enough, something & something & something else —

Courtesy of Facebook group, Return the Hartford Festival of Lights back to Constitution Plaza.
https://tinyurl.com/c106notebooks

Yet this tone of year stuck with me, felt like something I had to make up my own mind about. If not the religious interpretations of the world that compelled me the rest of the year, why then now? No reason.

Happy Season of Lights! :)

It was the music, even the religious or quasi-religious. Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker. Vince Guaraldi Trio's Charlie Brown Christmas. Rudolph. Frosty. Santa. Dreidels made of clay.

Even more, it was the lights. On trees, on houses, in yards. Electric & candle. How the grey dusty city I lived near & adored - Hartford, Connecticut - every winter erected an amazing pageantry called the Festival of Lights.

It's what we share, in all of our differences. Whoever we are, whatever we believe, we share light. Moon. Star. Sun.

Maybe amongst so many differences light is all we have in common. From it, from its behold of the world, everything renders, becomes, is possible.

And that's the challenge of it. A world where everything is possible. How to live in a human world where differences accumulate all the time, where the prize one achieves by becoming a unique person is the realization of how far & how near that achievement places one to everyone & everything else.

What this Season of Lights has shown me is that we are many, we are one, we are none. All these. Soft & hard. Whatever God or currency. Life emerged from light & abides ever by its strange magicks.

I wish each of you health & happiness & if I could I'd gift you with the hope I carry that difference expressed & empathized by can prove a very deep & healing bond.

Happy Season of Lights ii ☮ 12/22/2018 Cambridge Mass.

The Cenacle

Number 106 | December 2018

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Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

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Thank you to all of those who have attended gatherings of the Jellicle Literary Guild during the course of its 30 years. Here's to many more great meetings!

Scriptor Press
New England
2018

Feedback on Cenacle 105 | October 2018

From Greg Kelly:

For me, endings are what make a piece of writing. Of course there's plenty that goes into getting us from the opening breath to the closing echo. But it's the ending that, well, is simply marvelous. The best. Needed.

And it's Martina Newberry's ending to her poem "Everything" that closes off a beautiful series of lines, story. It dusts up the floor of neatly etched descriptions: "I said everything—told you about a man's wrinkled collar"; "a woman 2 rows down holding up a stiff back and attentive posture"; "fear pulling the blankets off the night before—"

I read and reread and re-reread this amazing poem, and was sitting right alongside Newberry while she was in her staff meeting. I looked over her shoulder and watched her write "Everything." What a privilege! She reminds us that writers will always write on anything, even to the point when all of the ink runs out, and we are left with only our blood or spit. She reminds us of the importance of communication such that, no matter how late it comes, we still always desire to tell someone everything. Cheers Marina! All very well said.

* * * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Martina Newberry's poem "Everything" is a subtle, beautiful exploration of past bonds, and how we change over time. It made me nostalgic for similar relationships and friendships in the past. It perfectly captures that moment of discovering something that takes you back in time to a special time, a special bond. It does this without feeling maudlin or forced. A wonderful piece.

* * * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

What a fabulous cover to the October 2018 *Cenacle!* Such a delight to see Kassandra Soulard's autumnal salute.

Martina Newberry's poem "Everything" of her last letter to a faraway friend, and how she describes everything in her present moment, makes me long for those days when writing a letter was an invitation into the life. I want to write such a letter, have a friend who would receive such a letter, and take time to read and then write their own present moment. *Longing*.

Then comes the squirrel eating a triangle of pizza in Ace Boggess' poem "How Does One Not Come Apart?"—& its line: "It's little things that melt the gold / to stitch our broken pieces into place."

Exactly, Ace—the little things that occur while we're working on big things. Little things that hold us from floating away.

I love Tamara Miles' poem "Car Parked Uphill" for all the right reasons—it's true, it's evocative, it's romantic, and it suggests that, within us, exists a brotherhood of faith and forgiveness.

And Gregory Kelly's lines in his poem "The force that pushes the water to shore": "let the wind run its fingers / Through my being." A perfect capture of being in the moment, ego unplugged.

* * * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

Absolutely became lost in Nathan D. Horowitz's "Provisional Truths." Such fine writing. I was drawn in and imprisoned by wonderful storytelling such as this delicious conversation:

So Don Joaquín told me the forest is full of passages to other worlds. In visions, a shaman can travel through 'em to villages where animals like wild pigs live. Over there, they look just like people. The shaman can talk to the chief and ask for some pigs

to feed his family. If the chief agrees, he'll send the pigs out through the passages in the morning to be hunted."
"Do you believe all that?" I asked.
"It's hard to believe, and hard not to believe," Mark said, his eyes steady in the light of the lamp.
I nodded. "I wouldn't put it past Ha'kë to go into another dimension and visit spirits. I've read a lot of stories about shamans doing stuff like that. But why doesn't he summon wild pigs more often?"
Dave said, "Because he's a high, proper master of the way, which means he's not greedy. It's something he'd only do if it was absolutely necessary."
"Makes sense," I said. "By the way, is there any more chicken?"

The ending poem of this piece said exactly what I was feeling:

All this music moves me.

I stay up late watching this poem
sprout between my hands.

* * * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

In her poem "Everything," Martina Newberry took this reader's breath away with a poignant poem about a faded friendship. The narrator finds a letter she once wrote to a dear friend. The poem is a testimony to the power of writing, in this case the original letter, to spring across the decades and knock our socks off.

Colin James weighs in with the extremely different yet equally impactful poem "Ton Pussy Est Aussi Précieux Que L'Or." One of the pleasures of reading a Colin James poem is never knowing exactly where the hell it's proceeding with its short, precise, sure-footed steps.

In "The Mother-in-Law Present," Charlie Beyer tells us some of why it's hard to get rich off mining—here, a matter of human error and Kafkaesque bureaucracy. Featuring a pulse-pounding journey into a beautiful, terrifying wilderness haunted by savage, slavering survivalists, and a white-knuckled descent into a hell of paperwork guarded by spinsters and their lawyer acolytes.

Gregory Kelly presents a pair of lyrical, lovely poems in which a man contemplates Nature and eventually comes up against the limits of what he can perceive and understand; the end lines of these poems are like fingers moving in the dark, toward the echoes of something ungraspable, untouchable, but deeply felt.

The piece that my heart felt most this time of Raymond Soulard Jr.'s work was his *Notes from New England's* Homeric catalog of lost things and people—we should all write catalogs like this.

Kassandra Soulard provides, as always, beautiful and enlightening images to keep the text company and hold its many small hands.

* * * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

Joe Ciccone's delightful poem "Muskeget Island" caught my eye especially in the October 2018 *Cenacle*. He exhibits an economy of language that pays dividends in the richness of its poetic expansiveness, in which the whole is most certainly greater than the sum of its parts.

I can't recall more vivid and clever imagery than his metaphoric turn of "the Great White rolling like a slaughterhouse floor," and his ending was particularly resonant for me.

Perhaps the motto of an age that sees ecological collapse all around ought to be: Let's "just let things be." I hope we as a society are not getting the message too late, but Mr. Ciccone is doubtless eloquent in his delivery of it.

* * * * * *

From Joe Ciccone:

Although I am by no means an authority on the form, Judih Haggai's first haiku in the October 2018 *Cenacle* is probably as fine of a poem on Art as I've ever read:

haiku
hidden under overgrowth
patience required

Can you imagine the size of the tree from which this poem was whittled down?

Ace Boggess does it again with the EXIT sign over the prison door, in his poem "What Is Hope to You?" But is this a picture of hope or torture? I think of Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues."

Kassandra Soulard has become a fine photographer. I enjoyed her black & white photographs very much.

* * * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

Joe Ciccone's poem "Self-Portrait #1" encapsulates the problem of impermanence in even our greatest loves, which are held in the hands of time, especially in the lines: "This place would exist without you / nor would it go on forever / as does Jupiter's storm / and its four satellites."

Judith Haggai, too, sees what is "hidden under overgrowth / patience required", and celebrates the continuity of the sunrise witnessed by "runners, writers, dogs, and birds." We go on breathing, she notes in her haiku, while "early morning blasts / fools and saints in headlines."

Kassandra Soulard's photography in the October 2018 *Cenacle* haunts and invites—old car, old trees in black and white—and, across from one of these photographs, I find these striking lines from the poem "Reveal" in Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *Many Musics*: "You were sent here, as a child, / to live in this world, of it, / until one day you would decide / to keep this place, stay here, / or depart it, let it go dark." That is the question we live with, all of us.

* * * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

Response to Jimmy Heffernan's "Notes on Science's Progresses & Regresses": I agree it will be hard "to bring everyone in the world to our standard of living." The solution? *Distribute the money in this world equitably*.

When the wealthiest 1% of the U.S. own 40% of the country's wealth, & more wealth than the bottom 90% combined, *who's gonna starve?*

What would happen in a true socialist state where we all got a chunk of the wealth out there? This would be around a quarter million for each man, woman, and child on the planet. Innovation would flourish. Humans just have to step up to the future, a future where life is free to flourish, like before the monkeys grew a frontal lobe.

* * * * * *

From Colin James:

Love Kassandra Soulard's cover for the October 2018 *Cenacle* and her inside photos. I do feel as if I know most of the contributors personally although we have never met. I hope they feel as if they know me too.

* * * * * *

From the ElectroLounge Forums

A Bit of Nietzsche Thread

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Jimmy Oct 6, 2018 at 4:50pm:
"In the end one loves one's desire and not what is desired."
—Friedrich Nietzsche

I have always found this quote to be particularly profound, and was wondering how some of you here might react to or interpret it. I think it would be nice to get a philosophical discussion going.

* * *

Post by Tamara Oct 7, 2018 at 3:50 am:

This can be true, and it is certainly the marker of possessive relationships, the kind in which domestic violence occurs—I desire you, you belong to me, you are mine, you owe me—none of these is love.

It's like an episode of *Perry Mason* in which the woman finally cries out from the witness stand, "Yes, I killed him. I killed him because I loved him!" No. That is not love. If I love someone, I love him based on his needs, not on mine. I love her because her identity, her selfhood, is worthy on its own, and I would like to be near it if I am allowed the privilege. If he loves me, it must be for the same reason.

That said, it is human to love one's desire . . . it is fundamental, natural. We can achieve something greater in loving if we can evolve so the other person's desire becomes more rewarding than our own, and more desirable. On the other hand, I'm not into denial of personal longings. When we love, we can (ideally) acknowledge our own needs and desires, and allow those needs to be met. We can be generous and gentle with ourselves in balance with our generosity and gentleness with the other.

* * *

Post by Raymond Oct 8, 2018 at 9:44am:

Desire is not tame, and it is not fully knowable, and it changes from person to person, moment to moment. It's like the part of ourselves that society cannot will away by rules and codes of conduct.

And it seems to have no set rules of its own. Certainly desiring another involves caring for that person, tending that person, helping that person both evolve and struggle through life. But we are not really logical or consistent beings.

And what we want and why, who we want and why, what we are and why, for that matter . . . we'd do well to stand a moment in awe of each of our own mysterious beings, as much as we awe before the stars and great trees and other beautiful and mighty and minute things of this world.

* * *

Post by Nathan Oct 10, 2018 at 3:38pm:

In answer to Raymond, Tamara, and Nietzsche, there is a longish short story about desire, called "The House of Unfulfilled Desires," that I translated for my Ecuadorian writer friend Abdon Ubidia's new book, *Time: Philosophical and Scientific Fictions.* Abdon writes a lot about the topic, and I think this story is worth reading.

Editor's note: Abdon Ubidia's "The House of Unfulfilled Desires" can be found in this issue of The Cenacle.

* * *

Post by Kassi Oct 13, 2018 at 8:52am:

In terms of Jimmy's original question, I think I read the Nietzsche line a little more literally and thought, yes, that completely makes sense. I think it is natural for people to like the way wanting or desiring something makes us feel.

Or maybe we don't like the way it makes us feel, but it makes us feel something. And that's better than feeling nothing. So then we start to mistake the feeling for the item that we want or desire.

* * * * * *

Diana Rosen

Bus Stop Story

The first thing I notice is the fine line of the beard
outlining his strong chin up to the side of his shiny bald pate.
He walks restlessly, rubbing a forefinger along his left temple.
Next to me another man poses the usual bus stop questions:
Has the Number 50 come? You been waiting long? You work around here?

The sound! The sound! Searing right through
me it starts like a hum then goes higher, louder, from ah ah ah
ah to AYE AYE AYE AYE, the man with the fine line beard
flails his arms like a bird ready to soar, whirls and whirls,
then falls into the street like a heavy boulder tumbling
down the side of a mountain. The questioner and I rush to him.

Still flailing, his right hand clenches my left wrist like a crushing
vise. *We turn them over on their sides now,* the questioner says calmly,
his cigarette dangling from his matter-of fact mouth, *no more putting sticks in their mouths to hold down the tongue.*

As we roll the man onto his side, his hand drops heavily from mine,
his huge shaking body becomes quiet. *I've called the paramedics,*
someone else says, *they'll be here soon,* and with that,
the chartreuse-yellow truck rolls up and medics step out
and into their official roles.

The Number 50 arrives and I climb aboard;
the questioner remains with the epileptic. I can't shake the sound
or the feel of his grip on me. A few weeks later,
the man with the fine line beard is back at my bus stop.
I rub my left wrist. Our eyes do not meet.

* * *

Tell Me Where You Swam as a Child

The sweet-acrid scent of chlorine, water clear enough
to see the white tiled floor with YMCA spelled out
in tuxedo black. Shouting contests test the natural
echo chamber of the open showers, our first test
of modesty; amazement, at our differences.

Outdoors, at the new community center pool,
Nat King Cole sings in an endless recorded loop of men
who've known *Mona Lisa,* and just finding love with
Sweet Lorraine, echoing from the high-pole speakers
as we practice laps in anticipation of the race
where everyone shouts my name.

With misplaced sense of honor,
I slow down at the six-foot mark,
let Maxine Cooper have the only win in her life,
leaving the pool only to walk among the silence
of all those friends of my parents who dislike the Ma
and Pa Kettle of our community (timid, small he,
large intimidating she, always with a rumor of
"No nonsense, girls!" around her).

Swimming in a lake, its squishy mud slick, slimy,
full of twigs floating around, so foreign against Clorox-scented,
piped-in city water. Swimming down the River Verde
without inner tube, yet wrapped in exhilaration, sliding over
water rushing downstream. I climb back up the river bank,
plunge into this embrace, *this eureka of danger*.

* * *

Even the hollow my body made

is gone
and yours, on the mattress,
standing curved, leaning as if
in prayer at The Wall, weeping
for what we thought we were,
for what we hoped we would always be.

Even the hollow my body made
is gone
and yours, on the memories,
splayed in my mind, scattered
into a bottomless pond,
not of sorry, not regret, not even
sadness, but emptiness
like the hollow my body made
and yours.

* * * * * *

Abdon Ubidia

The House of Unfulfilled Desires

[Fiction]

Translated by Nathan D. Horowitz

He was a gray man, an empty man. At the end of our interview, it was obvious to me how much energy it had cost him to take the decision to sue the House of Unfulfilled Desires.

"It's going to be easy to talk him out of it," I thought. His name was Verlag. He was the kind who didn't think he had rights. Who think they're in the world simply to undertake the task of living as if following a difficult and incontrovertible command. One of those people who avoid conflict and take sleeping pills. They've never sued anybody and nobody's ever sued them. They pay their taxes on time. They're not cowards, but they're not brave either because they don't understand the difference between the one and the other. They let themselves be. They slide like shadows through the world with neither great euphoria nor great depressions. They have a certain dryness about them. Mr. Verlag lived like a cactus in a desert. Or you could call him empty. Though, in the human world, no one is truly empty. Because everyone is filled with something, even if it's only air. Verlag's emptiness was filled with the cold, heavy air of melancholy. He was a sad man who waited for a golden sunset or a summer breeze to feel something like happiness.

One Sunday, when he visited a shopping mall with his wife and child, he saw one of our ads.

"WE SELL DESIRES," said the big banner. The picture showed a provocative blonde, a fashionable car, a plane flying to the Great Wall of China or the Egyptian pyramids, and a handsome young man smiling, everything within his reach.

It looked like an ad for a credit card, except for the box in the lower right corner that cheerfully advised:

SAVE MONEY AND ENJOY YOUR DESIRES.
WE GUARANTEE THEY WON'T BE FULFILLED. VISIT US TODAY.

Wearing a black striped suit and a freshly bought tie and shirt, Verlag strolled inside. He smelled of mothballs and old cologne.

"What's this all about?" he inquired.

"It's simple," I said, pointing to a poster of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard with one of his famous phrases:

Like a swan, desire
sings as it dies,
and dies as it sings.

Verlag read it aloud in a high-pitched voice.

The poster was somber, designed to counterbalance the promotional image Verlag had seen in the mall.

"Yes," he said. "I've heard that swans don't sing, except when they're going to die."

I felt as if a black bird were landing in my heart.

"Desires are the same," I said. "For them to exist, and for us to enjoy them, they mustn't sing. That is, they mustn't be fulfilled. Because then they'll die . . . And we'll have to bury the bodies," I added after a brief pause.

"Please explain your company's service to me," he said, with the disinterested attitude of our clients at this point of the interview.

"Just a moment." I leaned forward and looked right into his eyes. "Before continuing, I'd like to ask you, as a special favor, to tell me about any unnecessary purchases you might have made in the past year."

Verlag hesitated.

"A pocket device," he murmured, "that stores all the music in the world. An unbreakable robot for my son. And a luxury car for my wife."

"Tell me, Mr. Verlag, why do you call these purchases unnecessary?"

"First of all, because, after a couple of months, all that music began to tire me out. It was too much for one human life. Now I prefer silence. And then because my son managed to decapitate the robot. In any case, he prefers to play with a ball."

"And what about your wife's car?"

"She almost never uses it. She's afraid to. Once while she was in it, some thugs tried to kidnap her. It was a miracle she didn't get hurt. With the economy so bad, a car like that is a billboard that says 'rob me.'"

It was time to break open my arsenal of selling points.

"Well," I said smoothly. I was a professional in the emotions I dealt with. "Your case is dramatic. Perhaps extreme. But very illustrative. Do you realize how much you would have saved if your desires for those things hadn't been satisfied? And I don't just mean how much money you would have saved, but also life. Time. Human time. You would have avoided discouragement, disenchantment, disillusionment."

"Yes. I'm perfectly aware of that. That's why I'm here. How would the House have prevented these problems?"

"I'll explain in detail. But first, let me give you a few clarifications. There are desires and then there are desires. Some are basic, unappealable mandates of life: food, reproduction, shelter. Others are born from them and improve life: tasty cooking, romantic and erotic love, comfort. But the ones you indicated to me are luxuries, manufactured desires, unnecessary needs. Desires created to take advantage of the world's sadness. Those are the ones you have, and they're the most difficult to control because they've taken over the world."

I made the first of the usual pauses in the speech I had made so many times.

"For the renunciation of basic desires," I continued, "the House has a team of Buddhist monks. To restrict the second type of desires, those that come from good living, we have economists and psychoanalysts. But your problem falls into neither the first nor the second category. Let's talk about your problem.

"You suffer from the current epidemic. You want what you don't have. That is, the whole rest of the world. Which, as you will have noticed, increases its temptations moment by moment. Thousands upon thousands of sparkling new objects that will soon be obsolete. Monstrous quantities of incipient garbage. Which those objects begin to be as soon as they're purchased. The shininess of desire dulls with the possession of the desired object. And after a while, the object becomes part of the mass of indistinguishable junk that belongs to you and weighs down your life, your home, your mind. You're just another consumer. A consumption addict. A slave to programmed wishes. A prisoner of shop windows. Only, unlike a regular prisoner, you don't want to break out, but to break in, to cross the powerful barrier of fragile glass and live inside forever."

I paused for the second time. Verlag nodded, staring at me with an intense and myopic look.

"You," I added, "are going to tell me your purchases were damaged by accidents, by bad luck,

and that's why you didn't enjoy them as you had planned. That's a lie. You're lying. The proof is in the excess of music that you gathered in a single device. That device contains a song that was the soundtrack of the great love of your life. Now, many years later, you've listened to it a few times and it means nearly nothing to you. The sonata, the symphony, the choral music that used to enchant you are in there, too. Now they're jammed, cheek by jowl, up against rhythms by kids whose tastes are as incomprehensible to you as yours are to them. Everything mixed up and stirred together. But the overabundance of music isn't the problem. The problem is that you've lost your desire. Not to mention your money. And your time, don't forget. Your time."

"But, to be more specific, what could the House do to prevent my desires from being fulfilled?"

"The House could hold onto your desires as long as possible until they begin to lose their power. The lifespan of desires is intense. Its duration is variable. But desires always end up singing their swan song. If they're fulfilled, they die quickly. If they aren't fulfilled, they die slowly. But either way, their days are numbered. Even the most obsessive ones. We have carefully calculated the lifespans of desires.

"They grow old. They become extinguished. They're replaced by other, more tender desires. A desire is like any other emotion. Your life itself will always be longer. It has another rhythm. The lifespan of a desire depends on many variables. Love is one. Memory is another. A warm body, long desired and not possessed, is reduced at last to its own portrait, a statue of cold and ancient brass that barely reminds you of the warm, urgent flesh that tormented you back in the day.

"Am I wrong, Mr. Verlag?" I said. "Oh, I recommend a book that deals with that. It's called *Elastic Time*. You can look it up. It has an epigraph from Vladimir Lenin, the Russian Communist: 'There are decades in which nothing happens and weeks in which decades pass.' That's from 1917. But I recommend you read it. The book, I mean."

"Okay, I'll read it," Verlag lied. "But, really, what is the mechanism that the House would use to prevent my desires from being fulfilled?"

"We have a sophisticated system that delays paperwork and hinders your purchases—in a word, defacilitates them."

"And you're not afraid of being sued? If companies like this spread, the whole world economy would go bankrupt."

"On the contrary," I said, launching into phrases that we use on potential clients who want to feel intelligent. "The economy is sustained because not everyone buys everything. Nor can they. Economics is an art that was born of scarcity. Some people call it a science. And that it was, until a century ago, when the age of consumption emerged, with its illusions of infinite abundance. A plethora of desirable gadgets, which can be bought even by the masses, but which ultimately only supplant a deeper desire. The desire for sex? I don't know. Ah, Freud!"

"Freud?" He mulled over the word. In these interviews, it was necessary to drop certain names—Bachelard, Lenin, Freud—to gauge the clients' degree of culture and political position.

"Forget Freud. I should probably forget him too. I mean to say that you're facing a cornucopia, and you can—theoretically, only theoretically—take any piece of fruit from it. But if you choose one, another will replace it moments later. That's the point. Desire transmigrates from object to object. It's so urgent as to be endless. So you buy something and it makes you happy for an instant and then loses its splendor to become one more object gathering dust in a bland corner of your existence."

I paused for the third time. Verlag, somewhat pale, seemed to want to say something, but refrained from saying it.

I reinitiated my attack:

"That's what happens to you. You're thirsty, you're hungry, you're subjected to ravenous demands. So what do we do about it? We have a sophisticated process, tried and tested, whose implementation will manage to prevent you from purchasing that object of your desire.

"You're part of a small percentage of people who've experienced the swindle of consumer society

and managed to recognize the trap into which they have fallen.

"You're one in ten. The other nine don't come into our offices. They keep on buying and buying. Damaging themselves and damaging the world with that desire that grows back like the heads of a hydra. In this way, a strong economy of desire is maintained which, of course, is met, yes, with each purchase, but at the price of expenses, debts and, in the end, disappointments. So you don't have to worry: the economy, with or without my firm, will remain the same. However, to avoid any problems with the vendors, we give them a bonus equivalent to ten percent of the goods that we prevent our clients from buying—which, by the way, by mutual agreement, will never exceed ten percent of their normal sales. Do you understand? Ours is just another business, efficient and integrated."

Verlag suddenly stretched out in his chair as if he were on the other side of the desk, as if he were an executive and not a client. I detected the typical air of someone who lives for triumph, who lives for profit. He seemed bigger, like a hunter cornering his prey, like a chess player checkmating his opponent.

"May I say something, Mister. . . " He said some name that was not mine, perhaps on purpose. "Mister. . . salesman? Last year, a woman who was sitting in that chair gave me the same speech when I bought your company's insurance for unfulfilled desires. Word for word, she repeated what you're saying now. I know that next year you won't be here anymore, and someone else will pitch the same offer to another unwary client. So you're a nobody, just a voice rented out to the company that hires you, like those working class kids who sell mobile phones downtown without knowing anything about the technology inside them. I'm not talking to you, I know you're just an employee, I'm talking to the House of Unfulfilled Desires, which cheated me, because my desires were fulfilled, resulting in serious economic loss for me. See this package? It's the head of the unbreakable robot."

"I would advise you, sir, that you're confusing several different issues. The fact that your child managed to break the unbreakable robot is the responsibility of the company that produced it. You have to complain to them, not to us. A different issue is that you purchased it at all, along with your music storage device and your wife's car. You have to prove that you notified us in due time, as explicitly stated in the contract, of your desire to buy those goods."

"Of course I notified you! And well within the time frame that the contract specified!"

Verlag got to his feet. He seemed a tree covered in brilliant flowers at noon at a bright oasis in the desert. In his eyes, he'd won. He'd beaten us and we would have to pay out his policy.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Verlag," I replied. "You're a cautious man and a great citizen. Then you just have to follow the normal claim procedure. You have to prove that the goods were manufactured by firms following all international standards. Furthermore, you have to prove that your desires were genuine—both your own personal desire and your desire to satisfy the desires of your wife and your child. You have to prove that their desires were also genuine. For these purposes, you and your family will need to be analyzed by a psychologist as well as undergo polygraph tests. As a parent, I would recommend that you avoid this process. Many uncomfortable truths come out in those tests. It's like those reality shows where the participants earn some money but lose their spouses. The truth is always uncomfortable, and sometimes it's better to ignore it."

"So you're legal scam artists who never lose—like casinos, banks, and regular insurance companies."

"It would be best for you to mind your language, Mr. Verlag. I understand your state of mind, but you run the risk of committing slander or premeditated fraud. You don't know how much the House earns with those judgments. It's another of our businesses."

"What do you mean?"

"Premeditated fraud. We are certain that you contracted our service with the dishonest intention of suing us afterwards. The proof is that, despite all our impediments, you insisted on acquiring those assets, even resorting to intransparent tricks."

Verlag's face fell. He looked at me with hatred.

"You will pay me! You're going to have to deal with your bosses, and they're going to have to

deal with my lawyers!"

"I would ask you not to contradict yourself. I'm only an employee of the House. You said it yourself. I simply play by the rules. The same is true of my bosses. And nobody's interested in knowing who the bosses of my bosses are, or their bosses. As for the rest, we know you've never, in your life, hired litigating attorneys. And you've never faced a trial. Although you've often felt mocked. As soon as you entered the office, in these screens I have in front of me, your entire relationship with us was summarized, including our ongoing investigation of you.

"The screens showed me your old debts, your embarrassingly low income, your contract with us, even your wife's compulsive purchases. How could a man in these conditions buy a car he couldn't pay for without becoming bitter, even with a long-term payment plan? My dear Mr. Verlag, you knew that your life was sinking into quicksand. How could you free yourself? And without wanting to get into your private life, how could you keep your mistress, who you certainly love all the more because she's starting to get tired of you and your messy life? It's logical, absolutely logical. You do what desperate people do! You plot a big scam! That's what you wanted us for. Other people rob banks, or swindle their business partners, or hold strangers up at gunpoint."

In the choked voice of an amateur actor who has forgotten his lines, he said, "Okay. What should I do then?"

"First of all, Mr. Verlag, I must congratulate you. You're a good man. Quickly, implicitly, you admitted your false intentions. You could perfectly well continue with your claim for a long time. You could get involved in a lengthy trial. But you're not a scammer or a psychopath. We deal with many of those people. We know how to recognize those cases. We know how to face them.

"On the other hand, the House always accepts its mistakes. And when the client is right, the House admits it. This is not your case. You thought it would be easy to set a trap for us. You behaved like a desperate man, like a good man impelled by bad circumstances. You're part of a very small percentage of our claimants.

"The proof is that your carelessness is obvious. We've studied your situation carefully—your economic possibilities, your present difficulties. Your real desire was to overcome those difficulties. And to avoid buying more things. I'm sorry to tell you that desperation overrides desires, even the most basic and necessary ones. Desperation deviates those desires. It impersonates them. It makes them seem irrational, even the ones that are nothing but friendly requests from the body and the heart.

"The human being is a prisoner of desperation. Desperation can make any imbalanced idea seem reasonable, like your idea that it would be easy for you to get money from us. It's like what happens to the employee who decides to rob the bank where he works. He doesn't want the robbery itself, but the money he'll get in exchange for his extreme risk.

"Do you believe that a man in that condition is able to enjoy his desires for luxury goods? Not at all. He postpones them to some future when he'll be able to enjoy them. In desperate people, low-level desires are in charge. Desperate people take refuge in extreme decisions. Sometimes these decisions involve lust or mountains of food. Or in the denial of these. It makes no difference. In this sense, a person who's morbidly obese is the same as a person who's skeletally anorexic.

"I don't deny that, after signing up with us, in a moment of emptiness, you may want to purchase a tie or one of the thousands of cheap electronic toys flooding the market. Maybe you'll even do it. But without consciously, willfully acting against the House of Unfulfilled Desires, you won't be able to acquire possessions that suffocate you in a more definitive way.

"You made three unnecessary purchases. First, the music storage device. With respect to that, in spite of your bad intentions, the House will process your demand. As far as the robot is concerned, we can negotiate something.

"But the car you bought for your wife is out of the question. It wasn't in the range of realistic expenses. It was, technically speaking, the desire for the desire of a desire. A bit complicated, right? A lost desire. A relegated desire. Because to be real, a desire needs to have the nature of love, a yearning

to use a network of silk threads to catch an elusive and difficult object. This object can be a body or a thing. Desire doesn't distinguish between them.

"If, at the beginning, you had confessed your difficulties, and the true purposes that nested in your heart in spite of them, we would have helped you. But, no. You preferred to try to scam us. You thought the realm of desires was ungraspable and therefore immeasurable. You were wrong. You were very wrong. Desires are beings of the world.

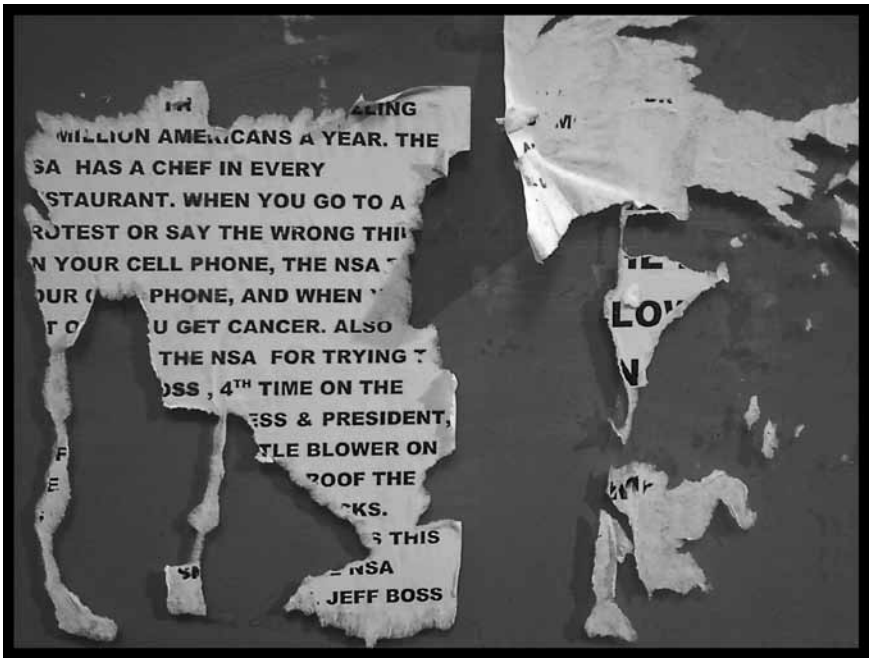
"Very delicate. Invisible elves, transparent butterflies, yes, but beings in the end. Concrete things like an aroma, an ephemeral pastry, a carnation of air, a gust of wind, a fishhook of light, a crystal net, a snake hidden in a basket of flowers from India! For the House, it's easy to weigh them. We do the same with dreams. That's our job. Do you have anything else to tell us, Mr. Verlag? Look at it this way: at least your desire to swindle us wasn't fulfilled. You can't say we haven't helped you."

I watched him walk away defeated and plunge back into his everyday hell. He didn't know that in a week at most he would be served with our lawsuit for premeditated fraud. The evidence was the recording of our interview. Then, like a black bird flying on a winter night, the idea of suicide would flutter in his mind.

I felt that black bird flying toward him from my heart.

My day had ended well. I had only to go back home, thinking, as always, about those clients who were so similar to me, and about my own demonic legion of unfulfilled desires—among them the desire to be loved, the desire to be desired and, certainly, the desire to kill.

* * * * * *



Martina Newberry

Dolls

Sadie explained that she has always done
her praying "on the move." As a child she
begged god for mercy at the doll hospital

down the street from her house. Her mother took
her there—her mother made dolls and chose eyes
and arms and legs with feet and toes or without.

Sadie begged god that the eyes would not look
at her nor the hands reach for her as she
and her mother journeyed the aisles. Later,

she begged god for no one to see her late
to school, that no one would notice her new,
thicker-than-ever glasses or the rash

on her ankle from walking through ragweed.
Later yet, she prayed that her boobs would shrink,
that her school uniform would hang straight, that

the mole on her neck would disappear. On
the bus going to school, she tried to pray
her mother out of the asylum, tried

to pray away the hour between dog and wolf
which she hated, prayed for a boy to ask
her to the sophomore sock hop. Sadie said

college years were a constant prayer. She pleaded
for physical beauty, for a boyfriend,
for a best girlfriend. Sadie was a

grownup before she took to her knees at
which time she prayed for peace, for a smaller
nose and, at last, for a husband. “Mostly,”

said Sadie, “I didn’t hear much back; the
occasional cricket, the silver tinkle
of a star, the throaty voice of the moon,

the soft slither of ivy journeying
up the trunk of a palm tree. Mostly though,
I heard nothing back,” she said. Dear Sadie—

Sadie of my favorite shadows, Sadie
of my most secret fears and failures,
Sadie of 6501 Hollywood Blvd,

your prayers have never been ignored. They have
simply been addressed with substitutions.
There is nothing to do about that, girl,

but take once more to your knees, forgive god
and make yourself grateful for the star-rise.

* * *

Waking on Gramercy Place

The source of all that can be seen
comes up to worry the darkness
out of my room. I get up remembering
everything, deciding nothing.

The flat of my hand massages my head
to make certain it's still there.
It is, somewhat mummified from
heavy pill-founded sleep, but still
attached to my neck.

First question:
where will I find gold in this day?

The source says there is gold there.
How far away will the fires be,
the shootings, the wars, the evil rallies,
the shouting of ugly people—
their meanness spewing out with
the spittle from their mouths,
from their hearts.

Second Question:
How far away will I have to take
this dilating mind, this tender skeleton,
to avoid those things trembling,
rumbling around me?

Outside, the leashed dogs turn
their soft eyes to the walk ahead.
Where to look, where to sniff,
where to bark and how loud?
Graceful and confident in their bones,
they take ownership of this morning.

The shootings, the fires, the wars,
the evil rallies, the ugly shouting
of ugly people will have to wait
until they've had their walks,
their appointments with the concrete,
and the tall palm trees, and the source.

* * *

As Far Away

The band is shortwave
and on it we hear
and participate
in the maladies
of direction, the
misplacement of hours,
maybe years. We hear
as far away as
this radio will
take us, or we become
itinerant
listeners, dialing
through station after
station. Our ears are
opaque angels, peering
into empty sleeves,
empty eyes, empty
bandwidths, always on
the lookout for the
paraclete—that which
will not be named.

* * * * * *

Gregory Kelly

<< yer blue pale >>

with blue pale in hand
its crooked handle
its dents its'cratches

it has been yer bramble
collector yer flower
basket yer refuge
to fallen pine
cones

you have used it to excavate yer sandbox

and in yer charity
you run the tide
from the pinnacle
of its climb

to heights higher where you turn out its pockets like Niagara race
back to the boundary of the sea shore repeating the elastic motion

you are summoned by the moon
sprint haste with youthful hope
to keep the pool from drying

some revolutions in life are worth yer heightened heartbeats
outofbreath patters and calloused toes from the rocky shores

the win may not be yers
but the fight the toil the
exhaustion the passion and joy
the strong willed persevering love

that single silent reflective moment you
keep hidden from the world and nestled below
your wintry eyes like a matchstick beneath a pyre

bears the petal pushing strength
of a flower in its season

* * *

<< Out beyond / The force that pushes the water to shore >>

Out beyond the driftwood the sand the seaglass our land the prints our soles trod the shadows adding to our trail when we are carried

Out beyond the horizon where this terra firma turns a corner beyond the not seen

Out beyond the grains of sand slipping hourglass from our hands adding to the height of cairns marking the pause in our steps

The moment between heartbeats the line between lung compressions and when our chest groundswells the surface between fingerprints intimately igniting percussive [snap]

The moment dust settles our bones postured the wind brought to heel the stagnant sun our fate sealed to all compass direction opportune an overwhelming orchestral crescendo awakening the muscles mapping the next flinching haiku thought cascading down our stature to the soles and the roots we transplant from cityscapes to where telephone wires do not stitch rooftops with fog fallen atmospheres where the rows of houses deadend our thoughts send the muscles moving our temporal figure anticipates what is

Out beyond the next wave we see Andromeda the galactic dust that once swirled in a nebula the formation of our Earth our existence cataclysmic behind a curtain like she we were made in secret ancient conceptions moulded and fired like drinking cups and readied for an age when our impact as grand as offering another traveller a drink of water

We see star systems like geoboards and wrap the stars with elastic bands

We see the distance from the soil at our foundation to the pylons to the treetops that are rolled hay bale hills

We see where the sky fails its azure pact where colour is bleached

We see telescopic renditions of coastlines like cartographers taking stock of the scapes they sketched and the blank page that is left

But we do not see what is beyond our reach
the hidden dip beyond a cresting tsunami
the force that pushes the water to shore

* * * * * *

Tamara Miles

Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

Clearing the Forest

I was born in Huntsville, Alabama, as was my daughter. It's also the city where my Moon grandparents lived for a while before moving out to the country, to New Market. Huntsville is known for its Space and Rocket Center, but it also has a lot of interesting history. For instance, it is the home of the Fox Army Health Center. The Center was named for Brigadier General Leon Fox, who worked on better treatments for malaria in 1941, when the state experienced a substantial problem with the blood disease, and when Huntsville had the worst outbreaks.

Kenneth Kessner of the *Huntsville Times* has described Leon Fox's service as Chief Medical Officer in the Caribbean during World War II.[1] In his work to organize services for thousands of people, he discovered that malaria was transmitted by the Anopheles mosquito.

A few years later, as he was serving in Italy, he successfully ended a typhus epidemic with the application of DDT. Beginning in 1946, the same treatment would be applied aerially in Huntsville at the Redstone Arsenal and, when there was a particularly large population of mosquitoes in 1951, combined methods of application including direct spray at breeding sites ended that crisis as well.

There's a note on one of Papa's insurance records from Woodmen of the World that he was a patient at the Fox Army facility in the 1940s. It's hard to read the exact year—maybe 1942? 1945? His address is listed as 113 8th St. Southwest. He was 6 foot 2 inches, and weighed 177 pounds. His father and mother, Nathaniel and Minnie Mae, were 72 and 68, and he had four brothers and one sister ranging from age 24-40. Granny was 33.

The unusual name "Woodmen of the World" comes from a scripture related to the concept of "clearing the forest" for loved ones, the idea being carried over to mean providing financial security for those who depend on us, beyond our deaths.

Joy Neighbors has relayed the history of Modern Woodmen of America in her blog *A Grave Interest.*[2] MWA was formed in the late 1800s by Joseph Cullen Root as a "benevolent secret fraternal society" that would bring together people of different faiths and those who were agnostic or atheist. Unfortunately, Root was later evicted from his own group because of "heated arguments" with other members. Nevertheless, he kept the name "Woodmen" and, in 1895, took over the women's auxiliary group associated with the society. Eventually, in 1965, the year I was born, the group was acquired by Woodmen of the World.

Dale Foresythe noted in an article called "Woodmen of the World"[3] that, from 1909-1947, 12,000 of its members were treated for tuberculosis at no charge at the Modern Woodmen Sanatorium in Colorado. Among other markers of its fascinating history, the company became known for distinctive tree monuments for gravesites, which visitors can still see at cemeteries throughout the country. The organization is now over 120 years old (now known as WoodmenLife), and continues selling insurance and investments as well as providing a variety of community services and disaster relief. Among Papa's papers were numerous life insurance documents from Woodmen of the World, none of which apparently ever resulted in actual payouts, but gave him peace of mind along the way.

The organization's tree grave monuments feature the words *Dum Tacet Clamat*: "though silent, he speaks." *Ah.* The dead speak through the ones who hold them in memory; who saw them at their

best and worst; who love, forgive, and celebrate the human being whose opportunity for spiritual growth extends through those who carry his DNA.

My inheritance from Papa and Granny did not involve money; there was none to give. Instead, I was left the legacy of stubborn survival and faith in a spiritual power beyond myself, and available to all who seek it. It comes by grace; we cannot earn it. Papa planted a bamboo forest in his back yard in New Market. I used to stand in awe at its beauty and be grateful for it. I don't know if it is still there, but remembering Papa and Granny helps me to clear the spiritual forest, and provides healing for me where there has been an epidemic of estrangement.

Timekeeper

"It is this man's duty to see that every employee is allowed time on Daily Labor Reports and that the hours allowed are extended correctly. It is his duty to balance hours allowed on Daily Labor Reports with those allowed on weekly clock card and to prepare the Labor Reports for the Cost Accounting Division. He is assisted in this work by four other Clerks."

This passage was taken from Papa Moon's documents. It is his adjusted classification of work at Ford, Bacon, & Davis, Inc., in February of 1945, from Timekeeper to Chief Clerk "A," which paid $244.00 for a 40 hour work week. It is signed by an L. King, Chief Timekeeper.

I'm fairly certain that the job was in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In 1943, F, B, & D were given a contract to construct the conditioning area of the gaseous diffusion plant there. In February 1945, Union Carbide Nuclear Division took over management of Special Alloyed Materials (SAM) Laboratories. In March of that year, according to an article entitled "A look back at Union Carbide's [first] 20 Years in Nuclear Energy [The Gaseous Diffusion Plants]"[4]: "the first enriched uranium was shipped from K-25 to Y-12"—K-25 being the gaseous diffusion plant, and Y-12 being the National Security Complex built for enriching uranium as part of the Manhattan Project—resulting in the Little Boy atomic bomb that fell on Hiroshima.

Papa Moon, my mother's father, kept time there.

I'm thinking of another young man who kept time, a second grandfather named Leroy D. Allen (who I believe to be my father's biological father). Leroy marked time in 1940 at the Kansas State Industrial Reformatory when he was 17. Two years later he would have a son, a boy who had to be adopted because Leroy abandoned him and his mother, Betty Jane Hamilton (Allen). I'm thinking of this boy in the reformatory, before he became a father, and about what kind of life he may have known up to that point.

According to the Kansas Department of Corrections, the City of Hutchinson competed with several other cities for the building a reformatory in the late 1800s. Its fundraising efforts rallied the support of many people, including a group called the Hutchinson Sewing Circle, which was formed by women working as prostitutes. The Circle contributed $1,000 for the purchase of 640 acres of land for the reformatory.

"All inmates at KSIR went to school for two hours every night after a regular 8-hour work day. They also went to school all day on stormy days and on Saturdays. KSIR's first vocational program was stonecutting. Many of the buildings built in Kansas around the turn of the century were built by men who were ex-inmates who had learned stonecutting at the reformatory."[5]

I wonder, as Leroy worked his eight-hour shift, and then spent time in his schoolbooks, if he ever imagined that, in the next century, his own name would appear in a book in which time is kept, in a sense, by the phases of the moon.

BOY'S OWN STORY.

I know nothing of my own parents. Myself and six sisters were left on a bridge. I was about six months old. The Salvation Army found us homes. The juvenile court took it up and gave us homes. One sister is living in Kansas and three in Oklahoma.

I have lived with Mr. and Mrs. Consedine since I was four or five years old. They treated me pretty good. I just got to playing with a bunch of boys. We found something they wanted. They stole and put the things in my pockets. I did not know they were there in my pockets until they searched me. The next time was in an electric shop. I broke the window on Sunday and got two or three flashlights. I just wanted to travel around, stop at towns and get some money out of a cash register. I am fifteen years old and in the eighth grade. You can't make anything stealing; it gets you in wrong. I do not know what I am going to do. I am going to straighten up. I do not like any of the trades up here. I want to be an automobile mechanic.

Kansas State Board of Administration, *Third Biennial Report: Penal Institutions,* 1923.

The boy's comment above—"I know nothing of my own parents," brings to mind my own father's lack of knowledge about his. When he speaks of his parents, he means his adoptive father, Clinton, who he loved so much, and his stepmother, Betty M—the one I speak of as his third and final mother. It's fascinating that, after all these years, we now know that he also started out with a birth mother named Betty. Betty Jane Hamilton fell in love with a troubled boy, the kind of boy we might insensitively refer to as impossible or incorrigible. Reading the personal testimonies of the boys at the Industrial School for Boys in Kansas has reminded me that they are, after all, mostly little boys who have had a rocky start in life.

Sometimes I don't see my own students as individuals with complex histories. I look at the paper in front of me, the one with the sentence that doesn't make sense, that isn't a sentence: "Is it ok to kill a human murder?" I think, "What? How does he not know by now, in college, how to write a sentence?" What happened with this young man, I do not know, but I sit in my grading chair and pronounce judgements. Meanwhile, such a boy may be thinking, as the one above, called Glen, does, "I do not know what I am going to do. I am going to straighten up. I want to be . . . (*something*)."

We all want to be something, don't we? Yet my kindness goes out the door sometimes, and all I can think is, "He isn't listening. He isn't trying."

My father spoke to me the other day of his school years. "I was good at art," he said, "and at gym, but not at what really mattered. Well, I was good at history, but not science, English, those kinds of things." The truth is, I wonder if he is in some ways genetic evidence of his father, and this kind of thinking makes me shudder. This is a boy who did not know, first, that he had any other father than Clinton Shelton, who adopted him. Abruptly, at ten, he learned it had not been as he thought. He was another man's biological child, and that man apparently wasn't interested in being his father.

I don't know what Leroy D. Allen's relationship was like with his father, if he had one at all. His mother was remarried. I have hoped he had a good stepfather who cared for him. He had a long history with the juvenile court, and he was convicted of burglary. According to Johns Hopkins researchers, stealing and lying are more common among boys than girls, particularly between five and eight years old, and most boys typically outgrow this behavior. The misbehavior is a way to test adult rules, adult limits.[6]

The ones who do not outgrow it, they say, may have more serious psychological problems. Boys who steal, they say, may be trying to impress friends, to prove to themselves they are good at something—especially if they are often ignored or belittled. They may do it if they are poor, or if they are rich—either way, they are troubled by something they can't seem to get past.

When 422 people were studied regarding their reasons for committing burglary, here's what

the researchers at the University of North Carolina found:

"Respondents indicated their top reasons for committing burglaries was related to the need to acquire drugs (51 percent) or money (37 percent), which was often used to support drug habits. Only one burglar indicated interest in stealing firearms, which is a common misperception."[7]

Maybe so. Maybe they steal for drugs, or for money. But maybe they steal to try to fill up a space inside that is wide open. Grief and longing have deep pockets, and sometimes a child keeps looking in there for lost words and lost people, and keeps pulling out nothing but somebody else's watch.

Endnotes

1. http://blog.al.com/breaking/2011/04/ask_us_why_is_hospital_at_reds.html
2. http://agraveinterest.blogspot.com/2013/06/modern-woodmen-of-america-and-tree.html
3. http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ar/county/greene/historywood.htm
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6. https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/pediatrics/lying_and_stealing_90,P02241
7. https://news.uncc.edu/news-events/news-releases/study-provides-insights-habits-and-motivations-burglars

* * * * * *

Courtesy of Tamara Miles

Hothouse

This love green as summer oak,
as maple, magnolia,
long-leaf pine, rising all to sun,
and I on my bench eager to play,

glad with admiration in a city park,
or in my own backyard,

this love a hot body thirst ready
for water balloons,

a splash, a fumble for clothes
we leave in a mad pile on the lawn,
so eager are we to cool
ourselves down.

Weird and beautiful this sudden
obsession with fire:

even the heavy balloon flying
low, about to burst, is red delicious,
brick-house chimney,

and the two of us on our knees
still smoking, doubled over
with laughter,

can't be put out.

* * *

Jambay Lhakhang

A demoness who lay
across the Himalayas

in 659 A.D.

inspired temple-builders
to pin her body down at strategic
places—

hips and shoulders,
knees and elbows,
feet and hands—

it was Songsten Gampo,
the Tibetan king's
command—

Jambay Lhakhang temple
controlled her left knee
in Butan.

At midnight came
the Naked Dance, a spell
to bind
a devil band.

But the demoness—
her lips
and tongue, her voice
were free—

and these
are all the tools
a powerful woman
needs.

* * *

Accessory After the Fact

You know how, on those forensics shows,
a murderer is always cutting up a big piece
of bloody carpet and covering the bare spot
with a chest of drawers? That's how it feels
when I consider how to apologize for the way
I have hurt people in the past.

It's like taking a photograph in front of a place
where there once stood a sacred antiquity,
but it was destroyed by terrorists, or a place
where we think something happened
but we don't know for sure,

when the best we can say is, "Somewhere
around here Moses saw a burning bush
and heard the voice of God," or "We're pretty
sure that the virgin Mary rode a donkey
down this side trail, pregnant
with Jesus and headed to Bethlehem."

I'm never sure if the apology is going to make
the person happy—it may be way too late
for all this talk about what I should have done
differently if had been a better person back then.

Then there's that AA step about making
amends when to do so would not cause further
harm. So—say I go by, I knock on the door,

"Listen, I'm sorry I broke your heart; I won't
do it again? I lied and cheated, I never finished
anything? I left you? Never paid you back
or, for that matter, called you back? I forgot
your name, in fact, for years? I should have spent
more time with you?"

This thing could really backfire, so here's my plan.
I pull up all the carpet in my living room,
and on the back I write, "I'm sorry. I'm so very
very sorry" in giant red permanent marker,
(we can pretend it's my own blood, see)

and I keep it rolled up in the trunk of my car, okay,
ride around with it in there all the time just in case
anybody ever pulls me over and demands to look
in there with a flashlight.

I'll be just as sorry as before, even sorrier.
I'll cry every time I need to find the jack
to change a flat tire, and it's winter, I need gloves,
and I find a pair in there that I borrowed
from somebody kind and generous who loved
me once and wanted my hands to be warm.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Notes from New England

"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as* Notes from the Northwest, *& appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

36 Love Epistles to What Happy Remains

December 27, 2018
5:53 p.m.
Davis Square-
Diesel Cafe
Somerville, Massachusetts.

This is a kind of sequel to *Cenacle* 105's *Notes from New England's* "36 Love Epistles to What's Lost." Seeking a kind of balance in now giving some loving time & lines to what actively continues along this life's ride with me. Learn how to love better who & what around me still.

1. **Kassandra Dawn (KD) Soulard**, met 2003, married 2005—I suppose, KD, know really, that you could be all 36 of these love epistles yourself. And I can't hardly say an imp's worth of what love & fondness & respect & desire I feel for you. Easier & more illustrative will be how you run through all these epistles in one way or another. You bring me happiness in ways I never anticipated or felt that I deserve. In moments when I make you happy in return, I know I've done something right additional to pen & paper. *I love you always.*
2. **Health**—I think it's only with the passage of years, & the close witness to loved ones getting sick, inform, or dying, & to experiencing these things myself, that I've begun to *feel* what good health is & isn't. KD & I devote a lot of time & effort to better health (medicines, vitamins, exercise, diet, mental & emotional balance), & both agree that it's fucking hard to do right all the time. Still, every time we hit our FitBit daily steps (10,000 for KD, 11,000 for me) or find new ways to eat well & delicious too, it's a fine victory. My parents lived into their 70s; I assume nothing in regard to this, but it keeps me hopeful.
3. **Museum of Fine Arts Boston**, known since 1983—In nearly 20 years of living in metro-Boston (1992-2002; 2010-present), I've never missed a major exhibition there. Written dozens of poems & lots of fixtion inspired by studying Renoir's "Dance at Bougival" (1883), & Monet's haystacks & cathedral paintings, & other pictures, in the French Impressionists Room there. My poetry sequences have built up from exhibitions like 2014's "Hokusai" & "Goya: Order and Disorder," & 1997's "Picasso: The Early Years, 1892-1906." KD & I have

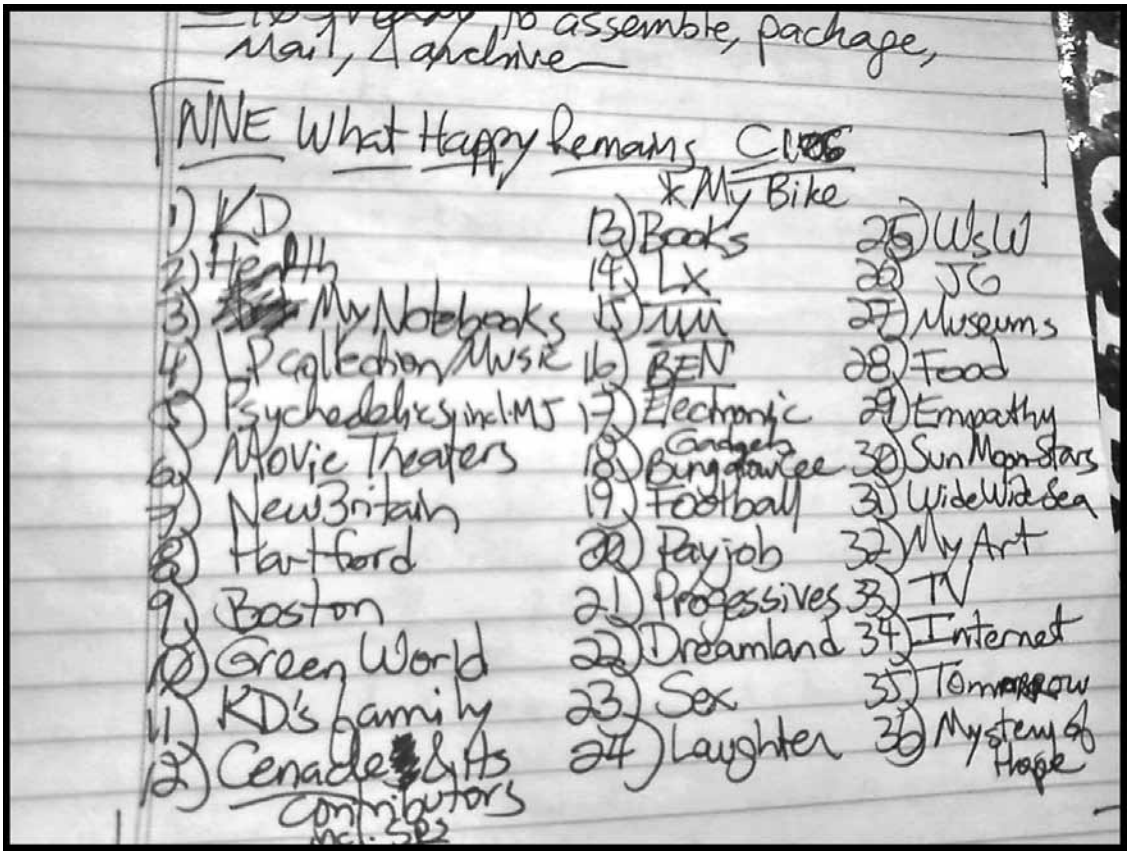
NOTICE

a beautiful quilt we were inspired to buy after seeing the "Quilts and Color: The Pilgrim/Roy Collection" exhibition (also in 2014—what a year!). When I moved to Boston in 1992, I chose to live in the Back Bay area of Boston to be a walk away from the MFA; now I'm a train ride away, but my heart knows no difference. Because I could not paint like Monet & Renoir, the MFA helped teach me to write like them.

4. **Payjob**, since 2012—I work at a local technology company as a senior technical writer, on the client training team. I am paid well & treated with respect. Last time I had such steady work, I was a teenager delivering *The Hartford Courant* every morning of the year. My job requires patience, persistence, a sense of humor, & also some technical skills. But the first three are far more important. I've had so many short-lived jobs before it, disappointments, layoffs. By this job I afforded KD her dream house, called Bungalow Cee, & to pay back on the grad school loans that helped me to develop the job experience eventually to win this position.
5. **Psychedelics**, known since 1997—These saved my life & continue to do so. Not only saved: helped me to become a better person; to write better & deeper; to love KD & my other loved ones more; to advocate with others for a healthier, greener, kinder, smarter world. They can be toys as well as tools, & a danger always to fools. Because of them, I found Phish & Burning Man. With their aid, I am at my best a person worth his patch of this moving world. At my worst, I know the path back up. Just as marijuana is getting again the respect it deserves, & its sanctioned place in the world, so too I hope the rest will follow soon. It is a better world for them.
6. **Vinyl LP collection**—Happy the ratty old boxes that once housed my LP treasures made it out of my friend M.S.'s flood-prone basement, & then years stored at a U-Haul storage unit. Now reside more comfortably in wooden cases in the basement of Bungalow Cee. How many? Couple thousand? Not all playable. I wasn't kind to or careful with them back before CDs made them scarce awhile. Not so scarce anymore, though more costly. My first LPs were from my mother's collection: *Johnny Mathis' Greatest Hits* & *Mary Poppins* soundtrack were favorites. 45s too. Steve Laurence very cool. Used to play them on my radio show, *Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/DJ Soulard,* back when it was on pirate radio in Boston 1999-2002. Brung a sack of them to the studio every week. Now they are for pleasure on occasion. Writing at home. Working on *The Cenacle*. Lovely things. Album cover, inner sleeve. Crackle at touch of a needle. Had to get my old 1980s stereo fixed not long ago. Audio Lab in Cambridge, Mass. They repaired both my phonograph & receiver. Work well again with big speakers JBIII gave me long ago.
7. **Diesel Café, Davis Square, Somerville, Mass.**—I've been coming here since 1999, & it has outlasted every other café I went to back then. Au Bon Pain, Curious Liquids, Someday Café, etc. Always a kind of long room, with garage door at the front for warm days, it got expanded to be even longer some years later. Wooden tables, strange art on the walls, rough cut & fine both. Long ago typewriters on a counter, for inspired tappings. I came here tonight to start this piece because this place is a lucky charm for my writing. And so it is again tonight.
8. ***Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/DJ Soulard***—Radio Free Cambridge, 1999-2000; Allston-Brighton Free Radio, 2000-2002; SpiritPlants Radio, 2003-present—http://scriptorpress.com/withinswithin.html—From my youthful imaginary *Sports Page Show*, broadcast in my imagination while delivering *The Hartford Courant*, to my perpetual love of Casey Kasem of *American Top 40* & *Casey's Top 40* fame, I've always been bound to have a radio show. Tried it in college back in 1986-1987 at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), liked it much, & this gave me enough skills in 1999 to talk my way into a Saturday radio show at Zeitgeist Gallery (in Cambridge, Mass.)'s pirate-station-in-a-back-room. Took an hour to get by trains from ZombieTown to Cambridge every Saturday morning by 11. Brung my sack of vinyl LPs. Et my acid or shrooms at high noon. RFC busted

by the FCC for its meager 100 watts of output, but luckily I moved along to ABFR, a show eventually three hours long, though on Sundays at 5. Then lucked out again when, in 2003, back from the West Coast, broke & sad, I found SpiritPlants Radio online to resume. 20 years of it come January! New rock album every week, classic rock album, lots of reading on mic, some trippy goofiness too. A perpetual work in progress, a perpetual thrill. In 2008, SPRadio was about to go under, KD & I took it on & rebuilt the full station from my show up with a regular weekend schedule. A *happy* project.

9. **Sunday afternoon football**—since 1971, when I picked Roger Staubach & the star on his Dallas Cowboys helmet over my dad's beloved New England Patriots. The Cowboys were great for so many years, then not great for a long while. So I learned to love the game no matter who was playing. I remember well the old drunken binges with JBIII & G.C.D., & the recent fun years with KD & her nearly inexplicable love of the New York Giants? I think she saw Giants QB Eli Manning as like Charlie Brown's derided little Christmas tree, & chose to root for him (*he has two Super Bowl rings*, but no matter). [now on Sullivan-to-Oak Grove orange line train] It's a great game, full of individual brilliance & buffoonery, teams that know no gravity to their graces, & others that know it too well. Even some of the announcers are brainy, funny studs. Chris & Al, Jim & Tony, Troy & Joe. Like a strange six-month TV show &, for those who've got its bite in 'em, an obsessively fun thing.
10. **Movie theaters**—known since 1969?—well, drive-in theaters anyway, where my father worked down in Connecticut sometimes. First time with a buddy seeing *Futureworld* in 1976. My *Hartford Courant* paper route money, & many jobs thereafter got me &, in recent years, me & KD, to movies most Saturdays. Favorite of countless visited? Easy. Coolidge Corner Movie House in Brookline, Mass., the theater upstairs, the screen positioned at the back of a stage, the arabesque designs on the ceiling. Favorite moment? Coming out of the Neptune Theatre in Seattle in 2007 to an alley where sat a beautiful old orange couch. I sat right down. KD took a photo!
11. **Our bicycles Sparrow X (2002) & Pixie (2004), both purchased in Seattle, Washington**—I rode bikes all through my youth. Got around by foot, bus, & bike, since I didn't drive then. Biking is the most physically demanding thing that I do well, effortlessly, happily. KD & I got our bikes in part to ride the desert at the Burning Man Arts Festival, many years of it. Best way to get around there. We still ride together up in Maine in the summer. When I'm riding my big old silver mountain bike—in Woods, on streets, perhaps in the desert again one day—, I *feel* freedom in my *bones.* Like when a sea turtle clumsy on land hits the water, & *goes.*
12. **Eastern Donutshop, ZombieTown, Mass.**, known from about 1999—It's a Dunkin' Donuts shop, like many of my favorite writing joints are. When I lived here in ZombieTown, a few blocks from here, laid off work, few pennies in my pocket, I'd come here late in the evening, stay till dawn, writing, reading library books (lotta Stephen King novels), sometimes dosed happy, often escaping into my own thangs to keep worries away awhile. Now I bike on Sparrow X here on occasion from the town next door, Milkrose, set up at my favorite corner table with my notebooks, pens, Polly iPod, & resume, less escaping, more happy just to be here again.
13. **Smith Campus Center, Harvard Square, Cambridge, Mass.**—Known since 2018—My beloved Au Bon Pain Café & its courtyard torn down in 2016, & Harvard University (property owner) spent two years creating a vast mostly public space, many areas of tables, some food stands, some creative wall greenery, & an outdoors wide open area of tables, some for sitting & some for playing chess. I've gone there near a dozen times since it opened in September. It's not the same but it is nice. Like other writing joints, I bring my pens & notebooks & Polly iPod, & KD too sometimes &, through doing my work well there, I am learning to love it anew.
14. ***Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]***, begun 2006—I've been writing fixtion since I was a kid, but it took me a long time to find my writing voice. Essentially, I wrote disguised biography in form


to assemble, package,
mail, & archive
NNE What Happy Remains
*My Bike
1) KD
2) Health
3) My Notebooks
4) LP collection/Music
5) Psychedelics incl MJ
6) Movie Theaters
7) New Britain
8) Hartford
9) Boston
10) Green World
11) KD's family
12) Cenacle & Its Contributors
13) Books
14) LX
15)
16) BEN
17) Electronic Gadgets
18) Bungalowee
19) Football
20) Pay job
21) Progressives
22) Dreamland
23) Sex
24) Laughter
25) WSW
26) JG
27) Museums
28) Food
29) Empathy
30) Sun Moon Stars
31) Wide Wide Sea
32) My Art
33) TV
34) Internet
35) Tomorrow
36) Mystery of Hope

imitative of writers I admired. Salinger, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck among them. It was fun to do but nothing too special. *Labyrinthine* is wholly my own, a world crafted both fine & shaggy from how the world around me & the Imaginal Space within me meet, touch, mingle, clash, affect. As of this writing, it's 3,440 handwritten pages in three thick binders. Typed up quarterly for its serialization in *The Cenacle*. I love this book & will do it on & on.

15. ***Many Musics*,** begun 2006—Like my fixtion, my poetry wasn't much for a long time. No simple path to find one's voice, one's themes, one's own way onto the page. Reading for years. Writing for years. Luck in having that little bit of fiery gift within. A girl I loved when I was 17 wrote poetry, so I tried too. My Master's thesis at Northeastern University was a book of poems called *Beauty, Obscura*, much of it inspired by Renoir's "Dance at Bougival" at the MFA Boston. When I was lone & heartbroke living out in Portland in 2002, I wrote dozens of poems in my *6 x 36 Nocturnes* series. Tripped high & wrote poems to keep that fiery gift in me alive despite my failures at jobs & romances. When I met KD, & we coupled, I wrote *New Songs [for Kassandra]* as wedding gift to her. Rilke taught me, Neruda did, Dickinson did, Whitman did, gifted friends along the way did. *Many Musics*, like *Labyrinthine*, is kind of a culmination of all before it. Shares my Imaginal Space between them. Typed up quarterly for *The Cenacle*. Ever sweet in my heart, on & on.
16. ***Bags End News***, since 1985—What best remains from my rough family upbringing. My younger sister Christine & I invented Bags End as a world apart where lived her stuffed animals. The girl I loved at 17 had similar imaginings, & for awhile we even tried to integrate our worlds. When I moved away from home in 1985, I began a weekly handwritten newspaper of Bags End stories to send to Christine. Eventually she grew up & away from these stories, toward her own life & world. I kept them. They had come as well from my love of Baum's Oz books, Milne's Pooh books, Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, Barrie's *Peter Pan*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Lewis' Narnia books. *Fraggle Rock.* Wrote them on & on, & in recent years introduced new places to the "neighborhood" of Bags End. Creature Common, White Woods, Dreamland, Bunny Pillow Farm, Imagianna. Fantasy worlds, the best of them, work through deep ideas about autonomy, responsibility, community, family, love. They give room enough for the mind of writer & reader alike to play, experiment, laugh, sing, try new costumes of ideas & wishes, & test fears & courage alike. Through the quarterly *Cenacle*, I'm now able to share *Bags End Books*. This is a very happy thing to do.
17. **Progressive politics**—I believe there is an ongoing struggle in the human world between control & liberty. Between those who would crush differences among individuals to produce a single way of living, believing, loving, *being*, & those who recognize the powerful interdependence achieved through *acknowledging difference.* A harder road, a higher one, a better one. Our prosperity, the world's, depends on how well we sort through our samenesses, similarities, & seeming points of no contact. Those who yearn some imaginary yesteryear where the rules were clear to all, & obeyed, & the high & the low alike knew their places, will lure awhile with these made-up tales when times are strange & scary (which in some ways they always are), but they bear no true & intelligent & useable hope, no real map to follow. So I say thankee to Senators Elizabeth Warren & Bernie Sanders, to Rachel Maddow, to Jon Stewart & Stephen Colbert, & many others who fight the good fight for days of hope for all, contrived from the best of the human mind & heart.
18. **Bungalow Cee, Milkrose, Mass.**, since 2013—When KD & I bought this house in 2013, I had been living in apartments since I left home in 1985. 28 years. Learning how to be a homeowner is a kind of strange fun challenge. Every repair & improvement occurs by one's own causing. The lawn needs mowing all summer. Driveway & sidewalk need shoveled all winter. Pictures can go up on any wall, so which ones? How much space to give to our green plant friends? Where to keep our books, & all my vinyl LPs? The pleasures of hosting friends'

visits. The cost of it all. Special care over electrical & plumbing issues. Happiness in returning from a trip. The trains that rumble by, just beyond the back fence. Sydnee, our beloved Grand Prix SE, in her hut. Bikes stored safely out back too. We three, KD, Bungalow Cee, and me, all collaborate to make it a good living place.

19. **Jellicle Literary Guild, 1988-present** (New Britain, CT, 1988-2001; Portland, Oregon, 2008-2010; Arlington, Mass., 2010-2013; Milkrose, Mass., 2013-present)—30 years & 145 meetings, its iterations have traveled it now to the friendly basement confines of Bungalow Cee, four times a year. People come in person, via their writings, via audio & video recordings. Where *The Cenacle* debuts, has since its first issue back in 1995. Sometimes the meetings are just KD & me & pages of *The Cenacle* & recordings of others. It's magick any which way. Everyone who would enjoy is invited.
20. **Dream Journal,** begun 2009—for nearly 10 years now I've kept a shaggy, ever-thickening sheaf of pages near our bedside, & every morning after I've taken my medicines I write down what I recall of the previous night's dreams. Sometimes a lot, sometimes little or nothing. I use this content on *Within's Within* to throw out "Dream Raps" to begin the show; I expand on these to create an annual *Notes from New England* piece, mixing the content into a single piece. Lines from this piece then integrate into *Labyrinthine* & *Many Musics* & *Bags End News.* These get read on *Within's Within* & published in *The Cenacle*. Dreams are wonderful raw contents for so many uses, not just Art. I would wish many more of us pay them greater mind, engage their potential & power.
21. **New Britain, Connecticut**, known since 1980 or so—As a teenager, I would sometimes escape evil high school by finishing my paper route & then taking the bus to this working class city nearby. Then I moved to New Britain in 1985, to live nearer my college, CCSU, & also to Roma Restaurant, where the Jellicle Literary Guild meetings occurred. Stayed in New Britain until 1992, when I moved to Boston. I return these days about once a year, stay at the clean budget Red Roof Inn, bring my pens & notebooks & Polly iPod to Capitol Lunch for great burgers, & to People's Donutshop (another Dunkin' Donuts) to write for hours as I used to nearly daily when living there. Hours at editing *The Cenacle* too. Sometimes visit my old library there, or CCSU to see how its campus changes over time. These are what happy remains of those long gone years & dear faces.
22. **Hartford Connecticut**, my birthplace—& my other option than New Britain for escaping evil high school. Much of what I knew in Hartford then is changed or gone, but I've taken it on myself to bond through writing & time with what remains or is new. An ever-youthful heart looks forward as much as yearns back.
23. **KD's family**, known since 2005—I don't think her parents or siblings liked me much when KD & I flew first time from Seattle to the Midwest cattle farm where they live. Maybe liked me a little more when I put a wedding ring on her finger that same year in their church. They are good folks, & I earned their affection eventually. Generous, & tolerant of my weird East Coast college boy street rat ways. My own family is gone or scattered, but I feel like these people always, *always* have a place at their table for me, a kind word, a warm meal. Our visits (from Boston now) ever reinforce this good feeling.
24. **TV**—Some educated people hold a snobby grudge against it. I don't. TV taught me a lot about the wider world when I was a kid, & no Internet yet. And nowadays it has so many good shows, real works of Art. Let me list just a few current & past favorites: *Twin Peaks, Northern Exposure, Fringe, Westworld, Walking Dead, Fraggle Rock, Doctor Who, ER, Wings, Frasier, Hill Street Blues, M*A*S*H, Community, Lost, Daily Show with Jon Stewart, Star Trek, Homeland, 24, Warehouse 13, The OA, Atlanta.* And so many more!
25. **The Internet**, known since about 1994—Back then I worked at Quantum Books in Cambridge, Mass. Sold computer books to MIT nerds. Wasn't until I built my press's *ElectroLounge* website

in 1998 (http://scriptorpress.com), moved *Within's Within* online in 2003, met so many good & strange & enticing people along the way, & found myself doing technical writing online for a living, much less able to read so many good progressive news sites like *Daily Kos* (http://dailykos.com), & distribute *The Cenacle* electronically worldwide, that I began to think the Internet could be, sometimes, a good thing.

26. **Electronic gadgets**—Polly iPod, Eurydice my MacBook Pro, Gumbee my cell phone, Lucy my OSX G4 Tower, Minee my little digital recorder, & many many others in Bungalow Cee. Not pets, not people, but tools I work with, enjoy, feel affection for by naming. Allow me to do work which, while it ever sources in pen & notebook, now expands in verily magickal ways to new forms, & out to new vistas.
27. **Sex**—I'm told, & believe, that some men's sexual drive & capacity diminishes as they age. Mine, so far, is the same messy, semi-coherent bite & growl in my bones it's always been. For this I am more grateful than not. Sexual desire is one of life's best proofs that living beings need each other choicelessly, & that there is a potent layer of the world always somewhere in the shadows of souls, affecting in powerful ways. Lotta fun sometimes too.
28. **Metro-Boston**—My father grew up in this area. My dear fried JBIII did too. I came here on a day trip while attending CCSU in 1983. In that one day I found "Dance at Bougival" at MFA Boston & the wonders of Harvard Square. Got home, discovered my bike had been stolen from the fence I locked it to. But the bite of Boston stuck. Lived here 1992-2002, left for West Coast, Burning Man, new lands. Returned with KD in 2010. New York City is bigger, stays open all night, has more bookstores & movie theaters. I love visiting there. But Boston has my heart in the way hearts are possessed mysteriously. Irrationally. Through an intimate familiarity too deep & complex to reck.
29. **Saturday bookbags**, got 2007 or so—I have this old leather shoulder bag, been repaired many times by Zipper Hospital in Brookline, Mass. (near Coolidge Corner Movie House), & an old white handled bag scuffed to a fine patina. Fill them with my notebooks every Saturday KD & I go to the movies, after I host *Within's Within*. Write as many hours as the day allows. Were I some years younger, I'd just bring my iPad & maybe iPhone. Not old gadgets like what I affectionately own & name & repair when needed. These heavy bags remind me of the best of who I am & the years I've traveled along.
30. **Empathy**—This maybe more esoteric than some of these entries. But I believe that trying to think & feel beyond one's self, one's own perspective & perceptions, is *crucial* to human relations. Nobody knows all. Nobody is always right or wrong. There are shared mental & emotional & aesthetic spaces to be found, created, nurtured. This is sometimes hard. Language, life experience, race, gender, economics, etc. can seem to hard divide one from another. It can be done. The wide, vast, mere land from me to you, to them, to us, to all, *can be crossed*. The map *can be made.* The breach *can be repaired.* When I am who wish I wish to be, worth my patch of this moving world, I act on these sentiments, I try to *live them.*
31. **Food**—When I was young, food was scarce in my family, & low quality for good health. I never learned about what it was, how it affected a body, what magicks & dangers it contained. When I left home in 1985, I tried to learn, ate salads, but mostly fast food & beer. Because of KD, I know more about food, its varieties & pleasures. We have a date every Friday night to share time & food. My old habits come up sometimes to just feed blindly old privations. They do not last long.
32. **Green world**—Took me years to discover that I love trees deeply, whether at Walden Pond, or an ancient cemetery in ZombieTown, or really anywhere. I love some weeds, oddly to some, for their tenacity. Flowers for their beautiful hints at some aesthetic order to the universe. Vegetables & fruits for their magick tastes & sustenances. Psilocybin mushrooms for their playful wizardry. And so many others. I love them all as equal inhabitants to humankind in

this world.

33. **Books**—I don't read as much as I used to but when I do it's as wonderful as ever. Reading a book is as familiar to me as breathing, as pleasurable.
34. **Wide Wide Sea**—I've always lived near the ocean, either East Coast or West Coast US. When I visit the Wide Wide Sea, listen to its music, watch its strangely patterned play, wonder at its big mysteries, of which I know very few, I am reminded that it cryptic powers move in my own blood, that I am native here as all.
35. **Mystery of Hope**—What confounds me is that despite our all being mortal, bound by gravity, subject to hunger & thirst, need for warmth, though not too much, need to shit & piss, limited in how we can affect much beyond an imp's worth of the world, subject to to many kinds of forces we cannot control & often barely know, that we still hope, still plan, still greet most days as possibles. *We want to progress, grow, shine, share, love, tend, heal.*
36. ***The Cenacle*** & its contributors & readers—For the many who have or do still share with me in the creation of this journal I say, *thankee with all my heart.* Art is how I do something good in this world, feel something good in this world, empathize, believe, hope. The best of me resides in these pages, close to the best of each of you. This journal makes it possible for me to try & live well during the other hours I dwell. Working my job, tending KD, visiting with others, trying to abide well this moving patch of the world. *Thankee, one & all, over & over.*

12/29/2018
Zombietown, Mass

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Judih Haggai

brain on the pillow
body shifts to upright
two separate lives

* * *

curtain opens
blast of rain takes center stage
roof percussion

* * *

thunder and lightning
rhapsody of sound effects
candles stand alert

* * *

rabbit from hat
people from elevator
thoughts from blank mind

* * *

chinese words
enter consciousness
travel through dreams

* * *

metaphor re-runs
staircases and bus routes
on the backs of seals

* * *

ceasefire
along with quiet, doubts
tiptoe through moments

* * *

long night of booms
been here, done this
peace seeds dormant

* * *

waterfalls, lakes
decorate cityscapes
while negev stays dry

* * *

our foreign voices
join in tibetan chants
resonance lingers

* * *

spiral of days
moment leads to moment
tiniest changes

* * *

amidst the chatter
silence is my refuge
ready when i am

* * * * * *

Nathan D. Horowitz

The Eyes of Glass Dogs

[Travel Journal]

Late morning. A hard rain's falling outside. We're under our plastic roof. We had a pleasant vomiting session at 4 a.m. with the gonsá, whatever it was. We got good and clean inside. When Joaquín's generation was young, it was customary to purge every month or so to keep the digestive system free of parasites.

Since dawn, we've spent a long time messing around with the big plastic tarps we live under; when it rains, water pools up on them between the down-slanting roof planks and the horizontal rafters of the edge of the roof; so we have to push a stick up underneath the tarp, under these pools of water, and push the tarp up so the water crashes down outside with a great splash that hits our legs.

Ever since Waorani territory, I've gotten a shock every time it rains, paranoid about my clothes and blanket getting soaked. Old leaves leave room in roofs for rain. Non-leaking shelters are a fantastic technical innovation.

François is feeding us crêpes—what we call pancakes—laced with soft little chunks of sweet yellow plantain.

Dry, bitter smoke from the fire blows this way and that.

The rain tries with its billion fingers to grasp the fire.

François touches down on Dave's hammock to eat a crêpe himself. The smoke's unpredictable. François leans to one side, then down to evade it.

"Say 'Rabbit, rabbit,'" advises Gus. "That's supposed to keep the smoke away."

"He's right," I say.

François says, "Rabbit, rabbit." The smoke drifts in his face.

"It doesn't work," he says.

"It never does," I say.

* * *

Joaquín's cousin Mariano arrived from downriver with his wife and daughter just as François was plopping a pancake down on my plate. I thought about giving it to them, but remembered several times I'd been in Secoya homes and not been fed at all when the hosts were eating. If I'd been fed, it was with surplus left over after the family had finished. *When in Rome, do as the Romans*, I figured. François can feed these guys if there's enough.

Dave sauntered up. "Why didn't you let these guys have that pancake, man?" he asked. "You've already had two. Can't you see they just came in from the rain? What kind of hospitality is that?"

With difficulty, I swallowed the bite I was working on, and looked up at him. I felt off-balance.

He went on, "It's like you don't know when to stop. I advise you to think about things like greed and gluttony. Just take a little time to think about what you're doing here. Whether it's for a high spiritual purpose, or whether it's about taking everything for yourself."

I looked down at the mostly-untouched pancake and back up at Dave. He continued: "Look at me. I'm a very humble and generous person. Everything that's mine is yours. I don't charge you money to stay here, although this place is being built with my money. For me, this experience isn't about

searching for power or knowledge. For me, it's about humility. Please meditate on that sometime. I'm sure you'll understand." He turned on his heel and, whistling, strode away.

The rain's finally letting up a bit.

* * *

We're planning to cross the river to fetch more boards that Martín cut. Our faces are painted red with achiote in honor of Halloween, a.k.a. *Samhain*, the Celtic New Year. The land of the dead is supposedly closest to us now.

Over breakfast, François—red streaked on his thin cheeks below his narrow gray eyes—said, "When I was fifteen, my best friend was killed, right behind me. Knife, right here." He touched his chest with two fingers.

"Why?" said Mark.

"Two hundred dollars."

The conversation turned to crime. François told us he and his girlfriend and another guy went to Jamaica last year. They bought high-grade weed and plastic food service gloves. They cut the fingers off the gloves, stuffed the fingers full of pot, tied them shut, swallowed them, and flew home to Quebec. Police caught the friend coming off the plane, figuring his belly was too big, but François and his girlfriend got through. The two of them shat the pot into a colander in their shower, then sold it for $10,000 Canadian, of which they had to spend half getting their friend out of jail.

As François finished that story, Rufino showed up—energetic, upbeat, wearing a red tunic—to have a word with his dad, who was away on a toilet break.

Because the break took a few minutes; Ha'kë must have been crapping into a nearby rivulet he'd recently discovered. He led us out to it a few days ago, delighted to have found such a good place for the task. He named the place *Watí Sitipë*—Devil's Ass, Spirit Rectum, or what have you.

Rufino picked up my copy of *The Yagé Drinker / Medicine Root*. He regarded the cover photo of the *yagé* drinker smoking a cigar, and said, "This guy was killed last week by his brother-in-law's witchcraft."

"Who is he?" Dave asked. "What happened?"

"A Siona. Mecías Ocoguaje. He lived down in Cuyabeno. He and his brother-in-law got in an argument about the woman they had in common—Mecías's wife. Her brother flicked his fingers at Mecías, blew on him, and said, 'You're gonna die.' Mecías broke out in black blotches, swelled up, and was dead in two days. There were six witnesses. The killer is in hiding."

François, confused by the topic and the fast flow of Spanish, tried to formulate a question, then gave up.

Mark said, "How's that possible? What did the brother-in-law do to kill him?"

"A shaman's considered to be armed at all times," Rufino said. "The darts are in his fingers. It's like carrying a gun or a knife." He leaned against a house post. "Two years ago in San Pablo, a woman passed out by the side of the river while she was washing her family's clothes. She woke up just long enough to say she saw a vision of the face of Geraldo Piaguaje."

"Who?"

"Geraldo was the last apprentice shaman around here. The woman said he'd hit her with a dart. Then she passed out again and died. Her brother went to Geraldo's house with a shotgun and shot him in the forehead as he was sitting in his hammock eating a plate of rice and fish. The killer went down into the lagoons of Cuyabeno to hide out. Nobody around here has seen him for two years."

I wanted to ask Rufino if his dad had these darts, but just then Joaquín reappeared, and Rufino and he conferred while I explained to François what Rufino had said. Then Rufino and Joaquín ambled off together, deep in conversation.

So the previous apprentice shaman was killed on suspicion of witchcraft. The current ones are

Jerónimo's son Manuel and us.

A crack of thunder. Rain begins.

* * *

The rain stopped, but the river is high and fast, and branches, logs, and whole small trees taking a swim prevent us from going across to pick up the boards Martín cut.

Dave has been studying permaculture from a book and is quite good at it. So we've been planting banana plants around a compost pit to turn garbage into food.

Rain just started up again. Rainy season starts at the end of October, i.e. now.

* * *

Wearing his pink tunic, sitting on the boards of the sleeping area, leaning against a house post, his bead necklaces and his broad face glossy in the kerosene lamp's glow, Ha'kë told a story. "Going downriver from Chiritza, a colonist in my canoe. He wanting what I having, coming up behind me with a knife, wanting to kill! I turning around, paddle, *PEEN!* Head. Colonist falling, canoe. I paddling to shore, putting stones in his pockets, water putting. That's all, finishing." He made a gesture of brushing off his hands. "People like that worthless."

My head spun. He'd killed someone! Just like that! That's what they call the law of the jungle: kill or be killed. "What did you do in South America?" I imagined someone asking me later. I would answer, "I studied law, jungle law." I suppose when someone's going around making trouble, and there's no authority to complain to, and no jails, the typical response everywhere and throughout history has been to solve the problem by eliminating the offender.

* * *

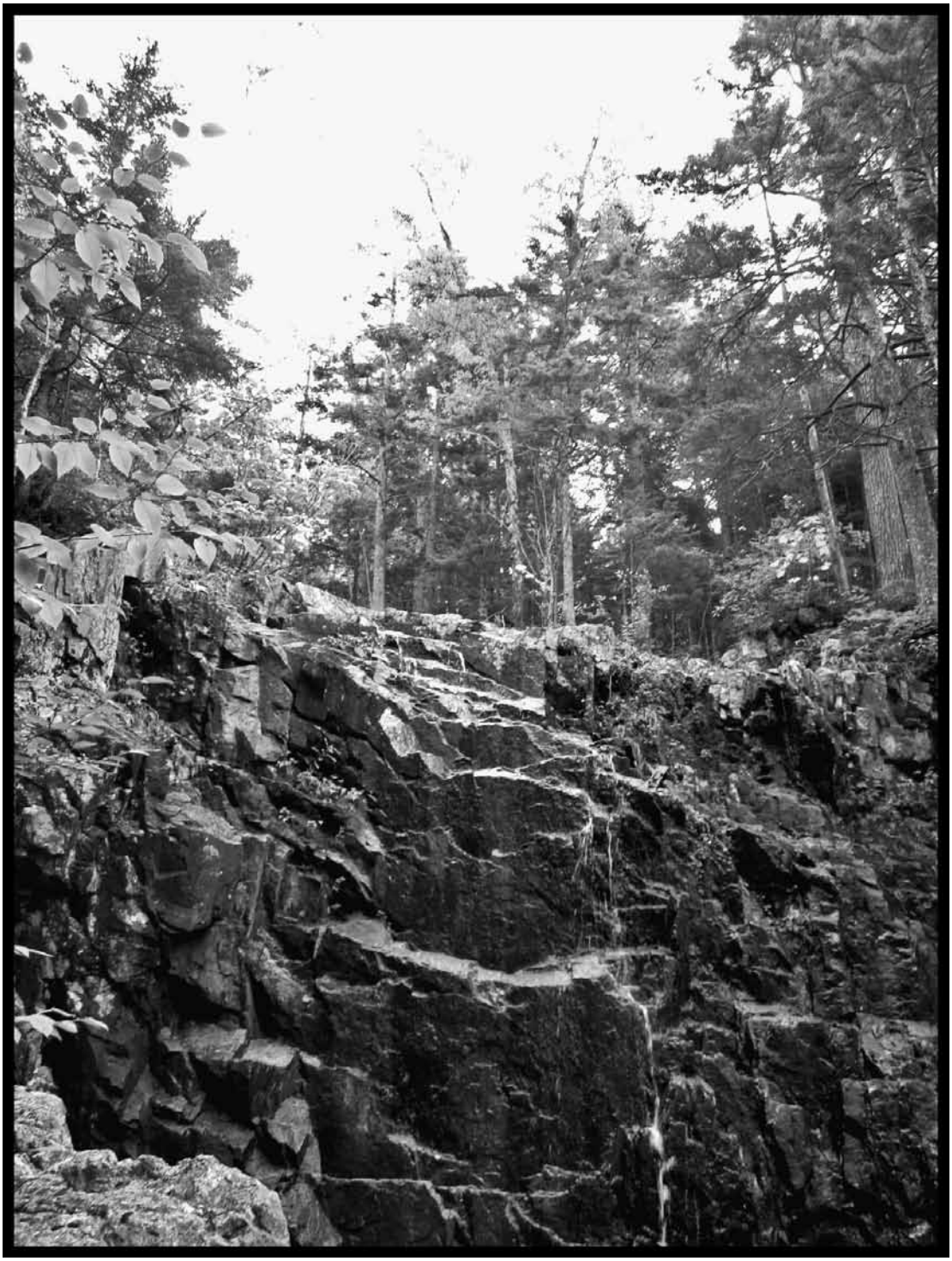
All these events today, including the stories that were told, are colored beads strung on the fishing line of time, wrapped around the crown on the head of the Angel of History. Today's contributions to the line: an orange bead for Halloween. A gray-brown bead for the boards we didn't fetch from across the river. A red for the achiote we washed off our faces in the river at dusk. Another red for François's friend's blood. A green for the weed François and his friends swallowed. A black for the blotches on Mecías's skin. Twelve greens for Dave's banana plants. A gray for the rain. Beads the color of the colonist's hat, the knife blade, the sun shining in the drops that flowed off Ha'kë's paddle, the canoe, the stones; the cool, snakelike river, sparkling with suns, that drank the corpse like a shot of rum.

* * *

I finished the lumpy wooden hoop for my crown. Now for the strand of beads to wrap around it.

In *The Yagé Drinker,* Francisco describes the projectiles that sorcerers use to harm people. He doesn't refer to them as darts like Rufino did, but says they're like little bamboo blades. A single-edged one is used to wound, a double-edged one to kill. The sorcerer sends the blade out and it pierces the victim. As it returns to the sorcerer, it passes underneath his nostrils. "He may become addicted to killing," Francisco notes, "because the smell of pierced human is very agreeable."

* * *



This morning over breakfast I complained about bug bites in my crotch, and Joaquín cackled, "They biting you there because you fucking so many girls."

As everyone laughed, I shrugged and hung my head, and flashed back to how Ricki felt, sounded, smelled, tasted, when we made love. *He may become addicted to fucking,* I thought, *because the smell of pierced human is very agreeable*.

* * *

Washington Piaguaje is in his early twenties, lame in one leg, strong as a bull. In fact, the first time I saw him, two years ago, he was dragging a bull by a rope tied around its horns. This morning, he was up on the roof scaffolding with me, tying palm fronds onto the frame with ya'i vines.

I said, "Why don't more people from the community come here to work on the community center?"

He said, "Because everybody knows that despite what you guys say, and despite that week of cultural revalorization your friend David is organizing, this place is really a house for Joaquín to live in." With these words, Washington sneezed.

"*Salúd*," I said.

"I have a head cold," he explained.

I pointed the blade of my Swiss Army knife at his forehead and offered, "I'll cut the demon out."

Grinning, he drew his hunting knife on me. "And I'll kill him when he comes out."

At that point, Washington and I nearly became friends.

* * *

A *yagé ocó* vine hugs the trunk of a tree behind the provisional hut. I'm plucking fistfuls of its leaves for a brew, using the hem of my tunic as a bag. I perceive or imagine the leaves dying joyfully, like soldiers, like Buddhists. The plant itself is nearly unharmed. It owes its existence here to its vision leaves. It has a good life, but has to pay a price, like all beings.

Glistening leaves, writhing in my tunic, half in pleasure, half in pain, what will you show us tonight?

* * *

Our faces streaked red with achiote, François, Gus, and I are cooking the brew in a clearing near the house.

"And more is thick, more is strong," reflects the Québécois, gazing into the steaming pot with narrowed eyes.

Gus chops firewood with the axe whose head sometimes flies off the handle and is clamped on with wooden wedges that have been pounded in on top.

With the black wild turkey feather fan that a dignified old man from downriver showed Ryder how to make, François beats at the flames, driving them higher, sending ashes drifting through the air.

In *The Yagé Drinker*, I read about a legendary Secoya hero named Waho Sa'rá. In one story, he hears enemies coming toward his village. From a word he hears them calling to each other, he knows what tribe they are. He prepares a defense and repels them. I told Rufino the story and asked more about Waho Sa'rá.

"He trained his powers of observation," Rufino said, "by drinking *yagé* in many ceremonies, alone and with others, both in *yagé* lodges and out in the forest. He had a very good sense of hearing. Once he punched a man's head off for laughing too loud."

Secoya values, I thought. *Be silent. Listen.* These Amazonian communities were always in danger of being raided by somebody. The hero was a quiet man with keen ears.

* * *

Back in the present, it begins to rain. Gus, François and I put up a tarp and sit underneath. I pass my notebook around and the three of us pen a collective poem:

About the Brewing of Yagé
On the Second of November,
In the Year Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Six
Of the Common Era

We thought of visions and crêpes and creamsicles,
amethyst-emerald angel-elephants;
Red, blue, purpul are the visions
of the pastries of the skyes makes your mind full.
Belching poisons buckled over rocking
back into the hammock, smoke and
ashes form a circle 'neath the cauldron of the yagé.
Smoke in the eyes and bugs crawling on the skin.
Drunken jaguars fall out of trees all around.
On the ground you fund hole of the univers,
yagé floats you children in the air the cool breath of night;
in the cauldron, steam and scalding broth,
pull magic from the twisted vine.
Raindrops fall like the eyes of glass dogs,
driy on the floor and change on a deep
fogs were you can only see the signes
calling back to raindrops falling on the tarp
above the steam and the gurgling of the yagé.

"'Raindrops fall like the eyes of glass dogs,'" quotes Gus. "I like that."

"Cheers," I say. Boiling hard, the pot hops up and down. Sitting across from me, minding the fire, Gus is tranquil. François is edgy, struggling with something in his mind. His sharp face cuts the air. The rain stops, the sky clears, I take the tarp down and hold still and listen like Waho Sa'rá. The metallic purr of a motorboat on the river. Invisible above the canopy, a pair of macaws flaps toward the river, cawing like crows. An oropendola goes "Stek-ek-ek-ek-eh-eh-eh-o'o—BLOOP." I speak its Paicoca name again, *umú*. The brew burbles, toucans yelp as they whoosh overhead, wood cackles as it snuggles up with flame and turns to ash. Yellow sunlight beamed into green tongues of brown trees that took it to heart and release it as orange flame to boil our brown brew of white magic.

Sunlight drenches me like water, soaks in and flows off my skin.

Sunflow, smokeflow, steamflow, cicadasongflow.

François flows into the woods to wrestle his angel in solitude.

The *umú* flows closer: "Stek-ek-ek-ek-eh-eh-eh-o'o—BLOOP!"

There's a national election flowing toward the U.S. in two days.

Gus puts ash on his bug bites, something he learned to do in Japan.

He tells me a Japanese proverb: "When the wind blows, the bucket shop profits."

"What does that mean?" I want to know.

"It means things are connected in roundabout ways that you don't realize at first. The proverb's from before the middle of the 20th century. Back then, people lived in wooden houses with wooden roofs that were made of planks. The planks had stones holding them down. When the wind blew hard during a storm, the stones would get dislodged a little and the planks would get a crack between them. Water would drip down into the rooms, and instead of going up on the roof during the storm to fix it, the owners would run out and buy a bucket to put under the leak."

I look back at the cauldron and wonder what winds are blowing in it, and what bucket shops will profit.

The fiery coals remind me of times in college when I'd smoke pot in the dark. My dorm room smelling like a Scythian tent, the world would dwindle and intensify to a bright orange ember, as if the sun were setting in the bowl of my pipe. This vision was magnificent, but as my mind verged on dream, I'd realize I wasn't sure who was smoking whom, me or the pot.

"No vale" (it's no good)—that's Joaquín's verdict. He's prone to giving mini-lectures on the worthlessness of what he calls "spirit tobacco," *watí muntó.* A few years ago, he encountered it for the first time, along with Jerónimo, Maribel's older brother Francisco's son, the silent shaman I drank with my first time here this year.

A government biologist presented them with a big bag of *watí muntó*. For several days they researched it, reclining in hammocks, smoking cigar-sized joints rolled in banana leaves. Eventually they reached the conclusion that, in Joaquín's words, "It not getting you high." That's the first time I've heard that particular complaint about weed.

Though there's also Maribel's story that she and Joaquín once rode to the jungle from Quito in a car with the government biologist, who shared, this time, some *watí* cookies. Joaquín got so high that the highway looked like a hair on the ground to him. During a pee break, he became lost in a bush covered with pink flowers, and Maribel had to tug him back to the car. "Crazy Joaquín," she giggled.

* * *

While I admit it's not an unmitigated blessing, I don't agree that ganja's worthless. The teacher plant smoked me, systematically deranged my senses, turned the dial on my Nezahualcoyotlian mental radio. She taught me to dream with open eyes, and eye with open dreams, in order to assess the archetypal structure of a situation, analyzing it like an inkblot in a Rorschach test; "to turn inside-out the pockets of things," as the Surrealist poet André Breton said the Surrealist painter Max Ernst did.

For example, if I were high and thought about the multicolored hat and the multicolored sweater that Jeremy Carver and Dr. Seligmann, respectively, were wearing when they encouraged me to study shamanism, I'd see the rainbow serpent behind their actions, acting in the world through them, as if they were two masks he slipped on to speak a few lines of text.

Beyond that, pot taught me that when I look at a representation of a thing, I can look through the representation, as if it were a lens, at the thing itself. Everything has a spirit, which images of it embody. A statue of a god isn't the god itself, but it may be possible to glimpse the god within, or behind, or ensymboled by, the statue. Similarly, under ganja's spell, literature, too, is revealed to be a lens, a screen made of words, an instrument (as Professor Salguera said about the *Popul Vuh*) for seeing. (This insight is valid with or without the herb. If you've been sensing a jungle, for example, it's because it's really here. Close your eyes and look around.)

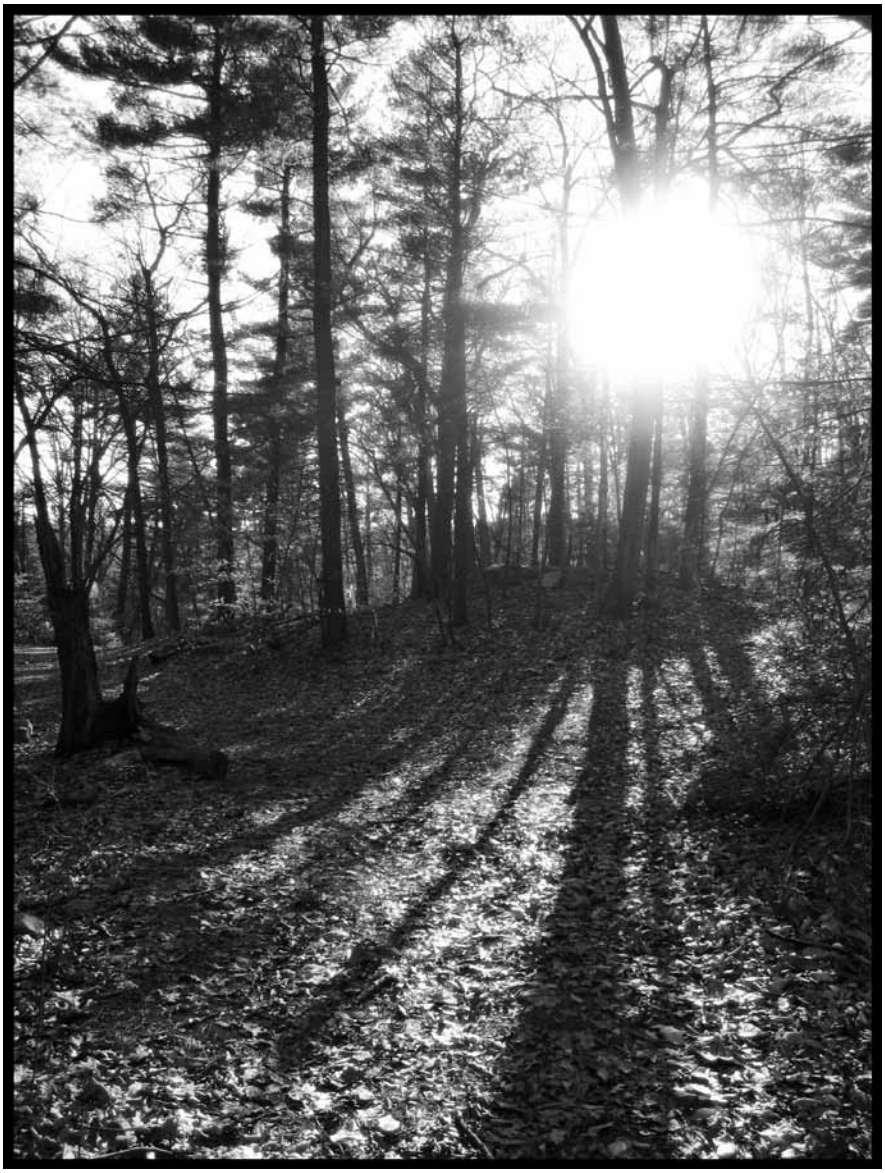
Admittedly, some of the ideas I've gotten from pot have been complete crap. Like the time I got stoned with a hippie in a windy nighttime doorway in Chicago and decided, on the spur of the moment, to ride a Greyhound bus to Arizona instead of going home to Ann Arbor. Bad idea.

* * *

Gus is chopping more wood. François the cook is absentmindedly peeling the bark off a wood chip as if it were some vegetable. His mind working on something, his jaw is slack, his brow furrowed.

The sky's a blue gas flame. My paper's so white from the sun that the shadow of my hand leaves a white afterimage as it writes across the page. The sun reflects down the length of the hexagonal Bic ballpoint pen, casting a reflection onto the page inside the shadow of my thumb. Is it time to move the *yagé* off the fire? I sniff the bitter steam and check the liquid's depth with a stick.

* * * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz

Dream Particles

[Prose]

We must dream our way.
—Pablo Neruda

Towers

A flight is delayed in a foreign airport. My two companions and I board a train to see the ruins of a sand-colored city several hundred years old. The train is built like a roller coaster but doesn't go too fast; the twists and turns and heights and depths take us past fantastic architectural details of spindly towers—some residential, others industrial, many enspiraled by thin, spiraling conveyer belts. I've never seen a place like this, not even in dreams. At the end of the tour, a tourism official asks us how we liked it. "Spectacular!" we say.

* * *

Whaling

On a huge fishing boat, someone has a line overboard, and hooks and lands a forty-five-foot sperm whale which, once over the edge of the boat, immediately becomes quiescent and gelatinous. The hold of the boat is rectangular and filled with quiescent, gelatinous, semi-transparent sperm whales, painlessly dying. One has transformed into a gelatinous school bus. A gelatinous, quiescent child gets off. A sailor puts his hand on the child's head and guides him away for dispatch. I know this is normal but it still disturbs me.

* * *

Switzerland

I'm visiting a Swiss Alpine village with lovely winding lanes everywhere. Cars are banned here. In a chalet overlooking a steep valley, I'm chatting with three local mountaineers. The sun has just gone behind the mountain. Someone projects a video on the near-vertical cliff on the other side of the valley. The images are of poor indigenous people from the Andes, adults and kids, close-ups of their faces. Then a drunk indigenous Andean falling down drunk at a festival and vomiting, again in close-up.

I say, "I'm surprised that with all the tourism money around here, the town lets images like that get projected." The locals laugh, name their videographer friend, and say, "He projects whatever he wants." It's only when one of the men stretches his bare feet toward me that I realize he's recently lost all his toes, half his left foot, and all the fingers on his left hand to frostbite. One of the other men is in a similar condition, and his face is also affected. I express shock and dismay but they laugh again.

Looking at a brochure for tourists, I decide to go to a Latin American nightclub in the evening. Waiting for it to open, I sit with my back against a building, looking out at Lake Geneva. Two older Amazonian guys appear on the street—a Colombian Yekuana in a grass skirt and crown, and an Ecuadorian Secoya in a purple tunic with a leaf fan. The Yekuana is stumbling drunk, and his Secoya friend is looking after him, singing a healing song and shaking the leaf fan.

I realize that the Yekuana is only pretending to be drunk. The Secoya sings over him and I try to sing along, knowing I'm no good at it, but doing my best. I recognize the singing voice of Cesareo, the shaman I studied with. He's the Secoya. He turns to me and blesses me with the leaf fan for a moment before I wake up.

* * *

Underground Cathedral

At a retreat center, I enter a room where people are lying down, chilling to a guided meditation. After a moment's hesitation (maybe I should stay here), I keep on going. Through a doorway I walk into a vast underground chamber, medieval, kidney-shaped, 300 meters high by 500 wide, all of stone with no columns, just the walls acting as arches, cleverly supporting the ceiling.

I'm blown away. I didn't think this town had something like this. It's been continually in use as a Catholic cathedral for six or seven hundred years. Plenty of people are around, on various kinds of business, and engaged in various activities, all connected with the nature of the place.

A great, deep channel runs down the center, I see now, and some priests or bishops are walking along in there on a procession with crosses and banners. I follow a path up high along the wall and call my mom on the phone and tell her how amazing the place is.

* * *

Immigrant

Teaching at a language school, I visit two of my Thai students in their pleasant cottage. The maid who cleans the cottages is also present, sweeping the floor. For my class, one of the students is writing a narrative about the life stories of people around him. The narrative should contain each distinctive voice, including its grammatical errors.

The student is mildly peeved with the maid because he asked her to be in charge of writing her own section of the narrative and she hasn't done it the way he wants. Patiently, I explain that she's from Yugoslavia, and her first language is Serbo-Croatian, and people from each native language all make the same mistakes in English, which result from unwittingly importing the grammar of their mother tongue.

The police are coming for me—some sort of immigration violation. I race out the back door. The students and the maid will slow them down, if possible.

I sprint through backyards and houses and across roofs. I pause atop a giant pile of the cut stems of a kind of herb. It's the season to harvest these. The pile is flexible and comfortable. I lie on top, peering over, watching the police try to find me.

I keep going. Soon, I'm a Croatian immigrant in Italy. Or an Italian immigrant in Croatia. It's not clear. The old city on the sea is beautiful, though, and I have a moustache, and a small rented room, and a job, and a hope for a better life.

It's Sunday, time for tourism. I head down from the city to the water. On a boat, among strangers, I see famous buildings. Then it's time to go back up to the main part of downtown. A native grumbles to me about the low quality of the transit system that will get us back up to the city. *Whatever the city government spends its money on, it's not this lousy transit system,* he says. We're approaching it on the boat. The boat docks and we get off.

The transit system is a kind of elevator, a moving track that takes people up. It's covered in sharp, four-inch spikes. We have to jam the spikes through our hands to take the twenty-meter ride up to the street. My companion grumbles, but his palms were already pierced when he took the transit down to the water, so he fits the spikes into the existing holes, sighs, and rides up. I realize my own left palm is pierced, too, from the ride down, so with disgust and displeasure, I impale my hand on a spike and let the track carry me up. When in Rome . . .

Back in my charming flat, I hear noises like tiny hooves on the wooden stairway, and two moon-jelly-like disks, each on four spindly little legs, come into view: two beautiful little robots walking up to visit me.

* * *

Oblivion

On a ferry, I'm going through some old empty notebooks to donate them. One proves to be not so empty after all, but is actually an old sketchbook of my dad's. The sketches are wonderful, including architectural details of 19th century houses, color studies, and a simple pen and ink drawing of a huge cruise ship in dry-dock, dwarfing two figures who stand next to the hull in conversation.

The passenger next to me is a tall Brit, of about 60, wearing a trench-coat. He asks to see the sketchbook, then refuses to give it back. I yell at him and shake him, but he acts like he doesn't know what I'm talking about. The ferry is heading into port. I'll yell for security guards or police to help me. He won't get away. Or maybe he will. As I'm waking up, I think, "He's Oblivion."

* * * * * *

Colin James

James Dean in Cornwall

The hospitality was normal,
if a bit on the short side.

Vernaculars to know,
I kept falling off the bed.

She had one of those English names,
Beryl or Fiona.

Went down to the sea caves
during full tide at night,
then twice in the morning.

Stayed almost a week,
continued homeward
on the queen, Mary.

* * *

Misophonia

Yesterday a huge party limo
arrived at the yellow gate.

It was a wedding group,
here to shoot wedding photos.

I rushed outside to get
the clothes off the clothesline.

The revelers didn't seem very appreciative,
or perhaps feigned disinterest,
as I stood there smiling,
my arms full of underwear.

I live on the border of many things,
one of which is Connecticut.

If asked to pontificate,
my three favorite movies are,
not in any particular order,
The Third Man,
Sunset Boulevard,
and *Debby Does Dallas*.

* * *

The Symbolic Child

Neither running
nor leaping yet
managing to clear
several fences
at a time—

textured and
non textured—

guitar case
dangling in this—

his sixth
sense phase.

* * *

The Restoration of the Essential Spirit

The elderly had scattered
and then returned
with hot drinks, hors d'oeuvres ending in I.

Room was made, preemptively.
The lecturer squeezed his hand pump
and the imitation penis rose.
"Preferable to four hours' worth!"

A disorientated gentleman
asked a number of questions
about scaring off squirrels.

His neighbor had purchased
an x-rated garden gnome.
It had a huge phallus
that changed colors, beeped,
shouted the odd provocative curse.

All to come in our evening session,
stale scones but plenty of birds.

* * * * * *

Ace Boggess

The Country Singer Wants to Die, and That's What I Like About Him

[Fiction]

In two years after my first local-band feature for the *Domestic-Chronicle*, I wrote a hundred stories for the *Life* page on rockers, rappers, punks, alternakids, jazz acts, orchestras, gospel groups, and even a barbershop quartet. National acts stopped by to chat or their managers called me up with quotes, but mostly I shined a spotlight on the wannabes, up-and-comers, small bands reaching for success. I wrote about the destined, and often the destined to disappear. In Pittsburgh, it didn't take long before I was better known around town than many of the bands I covered.

The editor filled my mailbox with letters and leaflets, cassettes and compact discs. I started slowly, doing a story every week. Then two, three, four. Next thing I knew, I turned in a piece and realized it was the tenth in an eight-day stretch. In that period, I'd only written four crime stories and taken one general-interest assignment. The music scene had become my primary job.

It was mostly an office gig at the time. I listened to demos and wrote reviews, found phone numbers to call for fifteen-minute interviews. I rarely attended shows or got up close and personal with a superstar. The Billy Ray Rose story changed all that.

Rose was the kind of guy not even sleazy, late-night barroom babes would sleep with were his songs not in heavy rotation on the radio. Just another one of country music's Billy Rays, he struck me as a typical backwoods heavy breather who caught a break. Receding hairline, fat jaw with diminished chin, gold fillings in tobacco-yellowed teeth. He dressed in straw cowboy hats, fake leather boots that glistened like plastic, unfaded jeans in deepest shades of blues and blacks.

Billy Ray Rose wore the term *redneck* as if it were his given name. *Hick*, to him, was a synonym for *friend*. He could've stepped straight out of a coal mine or a hole-in-the-wall after-hours juke joint in some tiny, isolated Appalachian town. He came from about three hours south—Charleston, West Virginia—not a giant city, but that state's largest.

The way I understand it, he made perfect grades all the way through school until his senior year when he slid to the middle of his class. At nineteen, he headed north to Morgantown, about an hour or so from Pittsburgh. He attended West Virginia University, majored in physics, minored in classical music, and completed three years before being kicked out—so the story goes—for racial slurs in class.

At twenty-one, Rose moved to Pittsburgh and formed his first band: Sparky Plugs. The name soon changed to Big Red Bug Guard, and finally to Billy Ray Rose and the Reds. He was the star of the band, after all—or so *he* said. Rose's group played dives and pool halls throughout eastern Pennsylvania, hitting every hole-in-the-wall town his drummer-slash-manager could

find on a map. That helped Rose build his reputation some, but he didn't need much buildup around here. In Pittsburgh's lifeless country music scene, his band was a happening act.

Billy Ray got his break when a friend of a friend of a friend's cousin got in touch with an old girlfriend who happened to be a producer in Nashville. She came to town at her ex-lover's request, caught Rose on stage, and fell in love with his sound. She signed him right off and flew him to Nashville, leaving the band behind. She liked Rose. The Reds weren't that lucky.

Rose recorded his first album, *Too Young To Give Up Drinking, Too Old To Forget.* It had one original song and nine by young writers with no future in the business—that is, aside from raking in some of the cash that Billy Ray made. Rose took borrowed songs and made them hits. His back-up performers over-performed, his producers over-produced, and his marketing team over-marketed him and his record until, within a year of moving to Nashville, and by age of twenty-four, Billy Ray Rose was a name known to almost every country music fan in the U.S.

His album sold five million copies, and his first single, "Even Bartenders Cry," went platinum almost overnight. He made a video for that goddamn annoying song which set records for requests, then went on his first national tour, opening for one of country music's *other* famous Billy Rays. After two more singles, "Lost Love, Where Are You?" and "Someone Stole a Page from My Little Black Book," he headlined small venues, relying on *his* name to sell out shows.

Billy Ray Rose became a superstar. That's what I know about him. It's what he is—or was—to millions of fans. It's not what he is to me. Not even close. No, to me he's a bad guy who made my life a little better just by being his usual annoying self. He's an interview that made me famous in Pittsburgh. Or infamous. But, like I said, he's just another one of country music's Billy Rays.

I met him at the peak of his fame, days before he released his second record, the flop that stalled his career. Rose was playing a Monday night gig at Star Lake, with the new disc due in stores the following day. For publicity, old Billy Ray had to suck up to hacks like me. He wasn't very good at sucking up. In fact, he'd been an ass to reporters several times over the last couple years.

He challenged one reviewer to a fist fight, and he once asked a critic, "Why's a black guy covering country music in the first place? Don't know enough boutcha own music?"

My interview wasn't quite that bad. Still, he had a way of getting under my skin.

It was Friday evening that found me working in the newsroom. I sat at my computer, mostly reading the day's wire copy about crazed rock'n'roll singers being arrested, getting in fights, causing riots, or whatever it was they'd done that day to keep their piece of the ever-shrinking attention span of the average American teenage compact disc buyer.

Arnie waddled over from the city desk, skin sagging from age and a newspaperman's hard life—like it was back in *his* day anyway. He wore the most bedazzled look on his face. It was like he'd seen Death across the street slipping coins into a parking meter.

"Collin," he said.

"Yeah?"

"Do you . . . ?"

"Uh huh?"

"Do you know . . . ?"

"What is it, Arnie? Spit it out, man!"

"Do you know who Billy Ray Rose is?"

"Billy Ray Rose," I said. "Country singer. Real dumbass. Got those annoying songs that make canaries kill themselves. What was it? 'Bartenders Cry in Their Beer' or something?"

"Yeah, something."

"Why, Arnie? What's up?"

Arnie twitched, a little unsure of himself.

"Come on. I've got work to do." It was a lie.

"He's on line three."

"You're shitting me!"

"No. He's on line three. Wants to talk to our music critic."

"He wants to talk to our . . . ?"

"Music critic."

"We don't have a music critic," I said.

"That was my reaction at first. Then I thought, well, that's sort of you. I mean, ain't it?"

"Oh, thanks," I told him, heavy on the sarcasm.

"It's your area," he said.

"I know, I know. Line three, you say?"

"Line three," he said.

"I'm on it."

"Thanks." He slapped me on the back as if we were old pals.

I put aside what I was doing, grabbed a pen and a clean notebook, and reached for the phone.

"*Domestic-Chronicle*," I said instinctively. "May I help you?"

"Buddy," said the phlegm-filled voice, "who am I talking to?"

"Collin Hearst. What can I do for you?"

"Well, hell," he said. "This is Billy Ray Rose callin'. Get it? Billy Ray Rose callin'? Collin, callin'. See?" He coughed, or blew his nose, or something crude disguised as a laugh.

"What can I do for you, Mister Rose?"

"What you can do's get up off your ass and get over here'n get this interview done with." He pronounced it *innerview*.

"Interview?" I said, enunciating the word just to be rude. "What interview?"

"You're supposed to interview me about Monday," he said.

"Don't know what you mean. When was it scheduled?"

"Right now," he demanded. "I'm scheduling it right now. Get here. I'll have security let you in the back way."

"That's short notice. I'm not sure I can . . ."

"Won't take no for an answer, Buddy Boy. You get here. Right away."

The bastard hung up before I could get more than a breath out in reply.

"Fuck," I said.

* * *

Jilly—the staff photographer I took with me—skittered around the room, completely speechless as she shot the pictures. I guess she was a Billy Ray Rose fan. Who knew? Even so, I think Rose intimidated her. If not him, then maybe his reputation. He wasn't known for being

nice to women. Or anybody else for that matter, now that I think about it.

"What makes you special?" I asked, challenging him, trying to seem tough—a hard-edged journalist rather than a feature writer who loved bands and free booze.

I almost expected him to lose his country cool. Instead, he answered with a somewhat despondent tone. "I'm not special," he said. "I'm successful."

"How do you mean?"

"Listen, Buddy Boy, anybody can be successful. Practice, hard work, a little luck—they all lead that way eventually. I mean, if you stick with it. Garth Brooks, Charlie Daniels—they's just plain successful. Worked the circuits, did what they had to do, put their whole lives on hold for the music and, you know, to build their careers. Seems to me they got what they wanted. They earned it, you know? But, Buddy Boy, then there's fellows like Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash. They's the ones I call special. Hank Junior, he's successful. Hank Senior, now that man was real special. Right? You get what I'm telling you? See the difference?"

"I think so," I said. I hated to admit it, but I agreed with his logic.

"I want to die successful," he went on. "I want to die dead certain I put all of what little I got into making my music. You got that?"

I nodded, a voice in my head joking: *so, he wants to die successful, eh? Fair enough. Sounds like a good deal. Why don't we get on with it?*

"That's good, 'cause a distinction needs made. Billy Ray Rose is successful. Billy Ray Rose ain't special."

For the briefest moment, I accepted his humility as a sign that an actual person existed inside the crude shell of a man. But he had to keep talking . . . the dumb bastard.

"What the hell. I never wanted to be special. I just wanted to pick up chicks. *Heh heh*. Now I'm famous. I got first pick of the litter any time I want. Shit, yeah. If that's the payday, I'd take being successful any day."

By editorial consensus, that last part of Rose's tirade got omitted. It didn't find its way into print despite my argument for burning him at the stake by showing off the *real* Billy Ray Rose to the world. Of course, I was still young then, and kind of naive. The world already understood the *real* Billy Ray Rose. At that point, folks didn't care. What mattered was what folks *wanted* him to be. Everybody had their expectations.

In a way, those expectations are why the interview made me a celebrity for a while. I asked him typical questions, and he answered typically. But then I asked the most basic question in a reporter's arsenal, the easiest softball pitch for him to smack out of the park, and one with no malice whatsoever implied or, as far as I could imagine, even possible. I said, "Tell me, Mister Rose, where do you think you'll be ten years from now?"

"I'll have sold ten million each of ten records, with ten million left in a bank account to show for it. I'll lounge around my heated swimming pool nearly naked, with girls scattered everywhere, you know, fulfilling whatever fantasies I have left. I'll be lean and tan, with bulging biceps and triceps and them other muscles. I'll be head-to-toe perfect, by God, and the best-selling artist of all times. I won't be able to leave my house without fighting back an army."

The editors wouldn't let me use any of that either. I had a feeling they wouldn't, but I wrote it down anyway and went on to the follow-up: "So, you think your fame will keep growing?"

"Buddy Boy," he replied, "come ten years, I'll have my own religion."

Reminded me of the words on the statue of Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*:

My name is Ozymandias, king of kings;
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!

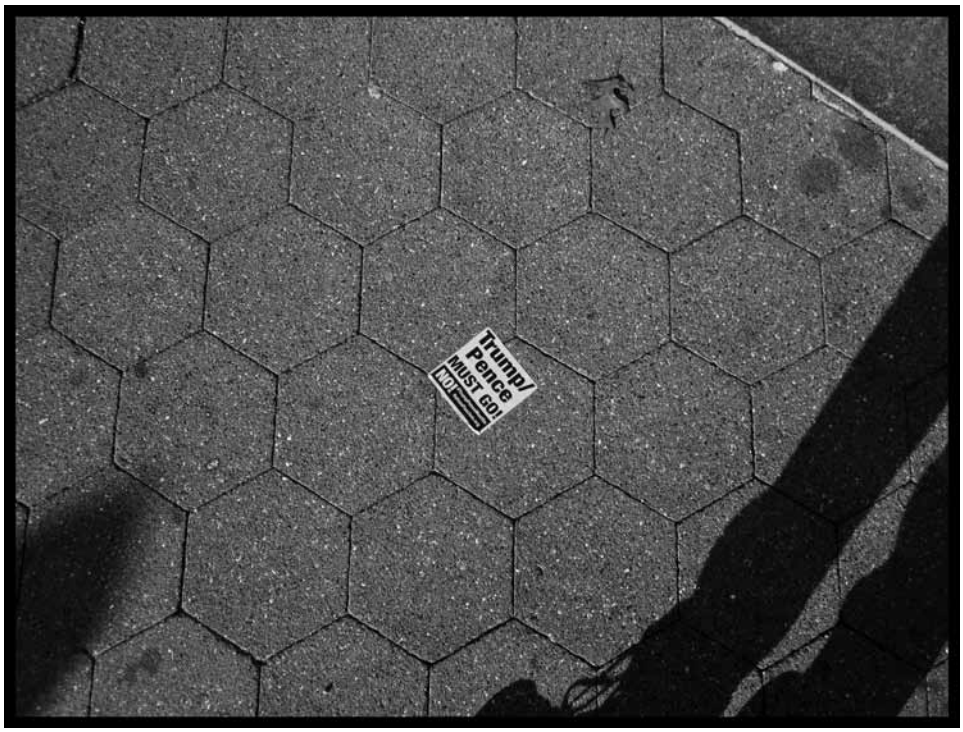
I inscribed Rose's religion quote at the base of my article, and the editors for some reason didn't edit it out. I like to think their eyes were tired after all the other bad shit Rose said that they found and decided to cut.

* * *

Anyway, that story made me news for a while. Several reporters from major newspapers and magazines called me at work to make sure I'd gotten Rose's quote right before they ran it, knowing the impact it would have. I told them the truth: I left out the words *Buddy Boy,* as on all my Rose quotes, so I didn't lose six full inches of copy. That satisfied them, though none of them found it nearly as funny as I did.

I won't say it's that quote that *began* Rose's downfall. He'd already made enemies. After all, he'd let his mouth drive from day one, but he never bothered to teach it to read the STOP signs and speed limits. Personally, I think he should've put it in park just that one time. There are some things not even a successful man can say.

* * * * * *



Tom Sheehan

Voice from the Gray

i.

Are you there, Thomas,
hearing the maple burst pods,
sunflower creak and groan up,
down-loam leap of crocus strings
silent as webbing in the corner
of the barn, tulip death
at wayward Chlorodaine
you spilled?

I watch you
in the mirror of stars,
renegade heart, April's savage,
killing the long winter siege,
scabbard clean of weapon
you clutch. You muster
your spring

voiceless,
thwarted larynx
sky-lifted, the amens
for buried blossoms, the sable
early flowers cede
to summer
end.

ii.

Do not dwell
on winter sludge,
April's vast recall,
memory of bulb and seed
working hard as sandhog.
They get hot every equinox,
volcanic up, forest
fire down, August
death.

Do you walk
where your father waits
socked down beneath the stone
all savings bought, deftly scribed,
"James 1903-1978," so off-hand
you wonder where reality
ceases?

Grass leaps
above him down,
has root of snake and worm,
grass root boa does its dig,
grapple gains your father's mind.
Wait, James, your mother loved
you no more
than me.

iii.

Visitations
take their time,
Who goes where, how?
Spring from the grave, James!
Spring! Spring! Oh, James, come up;
one sound from your broken eyes,
a hand at dusk, just one,
just send the bloom
once more.

Flower's fur,
toss and turf of tempest grass,
leap of leg you lost, grief-bent
in another vault. Are you wholly joined?
You in forsythia come-back, foxtail
lunge, lost son's lilac rocketing,
smash of lightning maple wears,
love-lies-bleeding is stranger,
lo, clethra and groundsel
carve your eyes.

Water washes
under; happy at this
infernal machine scored years
ago you gave me, I dream your rivers:
King Amazon whose ticks scarred
the leg surgeon's saw
erased.

iv.

Father of Waters down
to New Orleans town, the fist
of Harry Greb a log-slam to your jaw,
teeth achatter like old pickets
seized loose by rust of nail
and wild March air
giants kick.

Wrench of
Allagash log,
hump-backed stream
stole hook and leader
from your cigarette hand.
Down East does gray house wear them,
is the shadow of the hook
buried in this page?
What shark
where?

The Saugus
kicking the Atlantic
three miles down, square
of mackerel, stripers' pavement,
plaza where flounder bite the sky;
and six miles out, sixty yards astern,
we tasted salt together in the turgid wake
when I chased my Red Sox cap
and you chased me in much
too quick sobriety.

v.

Voice hangs
every which way hours:
Crow a little bit when in luck.
Pay up, shut up, own up when you lose.
Running begins in the heart, not the knee,
Not the density of thigh, slight puff of calf.
(Turning thirteen, rushing downstairs
for annual gift, your handing me
the hammer: *From now on*
you drive the nails
hereabouts.)

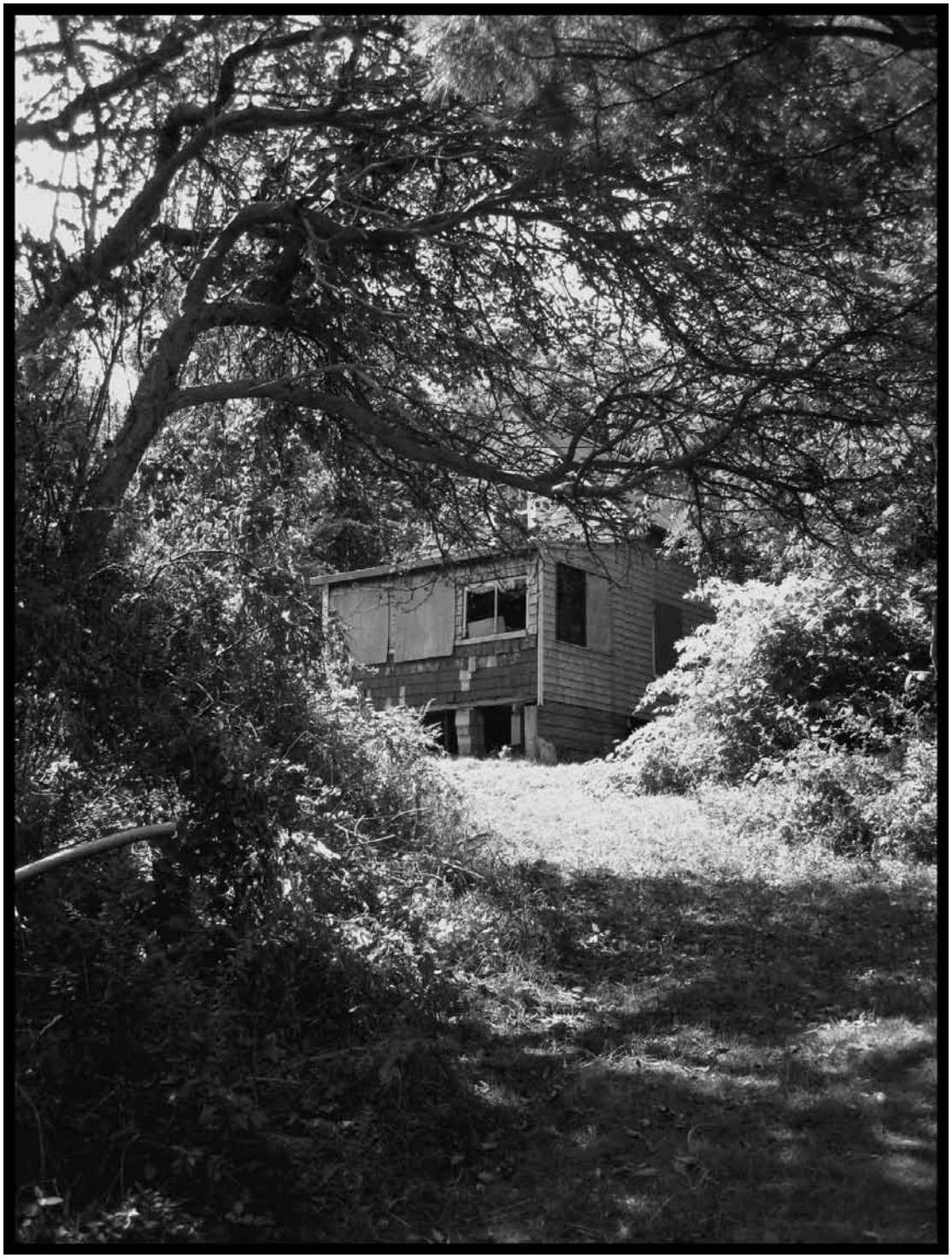
The fist-burst
in the 1:00 A.M. yard,
moon with cloud robe, peer
of cat eyes, my catching four clenched
hands of thugs. God knows how you made the back
door, concrete onyx for retinas, white cane
in rapier thrust and swish: *Work him, Tom!*
Work him! Work him! Gut of the Corps
coming like an erection.
You never knew there
were two of them.
You cried in
black eyes.

vi.

In 1945
white-water snows
came hard as spring Allagash,
broke the backs of buses, plows,
tore hearts of tractors out, spilled black
black blood, held the crocus six weeks back.
Icicle at your heart, snow writhing as spiders
at hip line, brood-bent, you swam six miles
home past knotted crankcases, fell in
the back door. I knifed the mackinaw
off, the iron laces of your boots.
Kissed you cold on kitchen
floor, rubbed my emery
hands on threatened
skin.

In one giant leap,
went seventeen to eighty-seven,
found response, am still there.
Walked home from war, heartbreak,
the hill above that holds your voice,
Riverside where the stone deftly scribed
is hardly your last sign, where we
will touch again
underground.

* * * * * *



Charlie Beyer

The Crocodile King of Belize

[Prose]

i. Punta Gorda, Belize - August 2010

The grey Norwegian rat tears at the back seat upholstery of the scuttled '65 Chevy Comet. The rat is matted over and scabbed, weighing about five pounds, and about the size of a small lap dog. Thomas awakens from his late morning nap in the front seat with a "Gahhhh," which shoos the hideous creature out the door. There is no back door, so the rat's escape is easy. There are no doors, engine, or wheels, as this car is in the back of a junkyard festooned with other gutted heaps and mechanical garbage.

The rat was trying to burrow through the seat to the huge sack of marijuana stored underneath, for Thomas is a drug dealer, and this is his office. For five bucks ($2.50 US), he reaches into the sack and grabs a fist full of the scrag, delivering it in a mashed gob to the client. Hand to hand. It's customary to carry the weed this way, for if an officer of the law should stop you, it is flung into the jungle on either side and instantly becomes one with the vegetation. No plastic bag. No trace.

But business is slow this morning, and thus he naps. Thomas is a shriveled little brown man with a permanent scowl. He may only be in his 40s, but looks 60. He is the local distributor for weed. The weed is called Mayan weed, a wild and not-so-potent plant the Maya grow as a cash crop to supplement their agriculture of scrawny corn. The contraband brought in to Punta Gorda from the hills, smuggled in rice sacks full of dried corncobs. It only sells in the town, the Mayan villages being awash in the stuff.

Thomas claims to be the last of the pirates who plied this coast in search of Spanish ships to plunder. He speaks wistfully but incomprehensibly about this, as though he stepped off the ship yesterday instead of 400 years ago. He peers out of the cracked front window in a lazy way, viewing the highway a block away, bordering the Caribbean Sea. Dark humanity flows by on foot and bicycles. There are few cars here at the bottom of Belize, in Central America. The end of the road is the Toledo District; the "forgotten district," it's called, as government services don't seem to make it down here at all.

Thomas rolls a joint with the unprocessed plant—leaves, stems and all. With three big Bambu rolling papers, he produces an inch diameter tube some 8 inches long. The cigarette papers are sold individually at Lavern's *tienda* (small store), along with rum, through a wire window on the side of her house.

For a single Bambu paper, the charge is five cents. When the spliff is smoked two-thirds down, a small showing of resin appears and gives the smoker a slight disorientation, as if just waking from a long daytime nap. So Thomas has nap grogginess from both ways. The weed-addicted rat watches him closely from the dashboard of the wreck beside him; its red beady eyes unblinking, calculating its chances to re-attack the twenty-pound marijuana bag.

As Thomas sits in his blue haze, he sees two Mayan children lugging a sack of corn, hitchhiking for a ride along the coastal highway. A blue van stops. The children disappear from the road edge as the van speeds off.

The blue van is a minister's van, a government employee of some minor bureaucracy. The

Department of Health, or Finance, or Social Security, or Agriculture. Thomas cannot see the writing on the door from this block away.

These ministers are ubiquitous here, and make it a point to not do their jobs. There is always a long list of impossible compliances to get the permit or permission for any citizens to perform some minor improvement in their squalid lives. Ultimately, the minister whose job it is to expedite will prevent anything from happening.

Thomas thinks little of the hitchhiking, except that it is odd that a government agency is picking up Mayan children, whose racial status is similar to the rat in this black society. The African immigrants who think the native Indians are animals. The rat fixes its eyes in a stare-down with Thomas. The drug dealer puffs the now shortened joint, it finally becoming a mind altering smoke.

ii. Aspen, Colorado - October 2007

The bar is closed, but not really. Inside at 2:30 in the morning, wealthy elite 20-somethings revel in music, booze, drugs, and exhibitionism. The Silverado Bar in downtown Aspen, Colorado is the place to be—if you are invited to the after-party.

The hardwood bar is covered a half-inch thick in cocaine. Beautiful people snort their powdered smeared faces in the dust, reeling wildly in whoops and hollers. Beautiful young women, clad only in frilly panties, traipse bare-toed in the nose candy, as ski jocks lick their little piggy toes when they pass by. The music hammers some cowboy rock. The boldest of the jocks try to get a powdered nipple to their lips.

Here is where Hunter S. Thompson hung out. Here is where Allen Ginsberg screwed some guy on a cocktail table. Here is where the movie stars of the world come to be shameless. Some play pool in the back, admiring more the bent-over lass than their 8 ball shot. Some are passed out face down on beer-smeared tables. Yet others provocatively dance with each other.

Three huge wolf / husky hybrid dogs sprawl by the door, uninterested in the human antics. A bare-breasted beauty hugs a beast on occasion, feeling the abundant soft fur on her sensitive skin, silently asking the huge canine for protection against gang rape. The dog thinks to itself that wearing clothes might help prevent that.

She needn't worry though. All of these people are highly educated, and are the children of the wealthiest elite in America. They get what they want, when they want it, without lifting a manicured finger. No reason to take anything by force. Wealth does the trick.

At the bar is a tall curly haired man. His nostrils are dusted white and his eyes are wild. He is a drifter and a confidence man. He'll spend his last ten bucks to be in the company of the wealthy elite, the children of gods. Around these people, he knows how to ingratiate himself, how to be clever, charming, how to be their friend, how to carefully separate their money from their pocket . . . & into his.

Jimmy Colton comes drifting out of New Jersey in the 1970s. His parents pay for two years at the alternative Antioch College, but the lack of structure does not hold him. He disappears to the West Coast and hangs around in San Francisco bars, thinking he is T.S. Eliot, wallowing in self-pity. Some say he experiments with homosexuality there, driving the Hershey highway from one sex parlor to the next.

But soon he smells the money and drifts down to Santa Barbara. Here JC (as he likes to be called) works for the harbor, doing minor repairs on docks and shorted electrical systems. The halls of the super rich are his hangouts, where he bumps shoulders with celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Clint Eastwood.

Being of a naturally erudite nature, JC fits in, posing as a wealthy art dealer; though in reality, no more than trailer trash. He lives in a Dodge van in the harbor parking lot and does his laundry in the sink of the public bathroom.

In one of his finer moves, he convinces Oprah to buy an abstract painting by Henry Moore. He obtains a note of credit from her for $30,000, then buys the painting for $20,000, delivers it to her, and collects the hustled $10,000. A ticket to Hawaii is bought. Hawaii continues his hustle to live as the wealthy do, but he is really an impostor with pennies to his name. A poser.

JC sets himself up as a surfing instructor and becomes the caretaker of part of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's estate on the Kona Coast. Things go well. Hawaiian tradesmen do most of the labor, Japanese do all the gardening and ground-work. JC, the flim-flam man, directs everyone with great alacrity and fanfare. Mr. Allen thinks he's doing a fine job, although the billionaire is there hardly more than two weeks a year.

In a few years, JC becomes bored. His circle of rich acquaintances is not expanding, his fortunes not increasing from graft or embezzlement. Then Mr. Allen sells the estate to actor Leonardo DeCaprio, who is more savvy than Paul. Leonardo is put off by the obvious bullshit coming out of JC's mouth, his general obsequious and shifty manner. JC is fired, tossed out to sleep on the beach. Keenly aware of the devolution of his social status, JC returns to the mainland, making his way to Aspen, Colorado, his next land of opportunity.

JC thinks he's gone to heaven. Here are the richest of the rich. The 1% of the 1%. He is among Olympic gods. And it's not just this new phony cyber money. It stinks of old money. JC sets up his "office" in the Silverado Bar. A rocking table with uneven legs, a beer gripped in his right hand. With his left, he waves people over, ingratiating himself and, without asking, acquires information about opportunities around town that do not require working.

In a week, he has dazzled a Jewish princess who is the niece of the Steinbergs. The Steinbergs have a modest 50-acre estate with a 35-bedroom castle, horse barn and arena, hot spring-heated swimming pool, eight-car garage with a five-bedroom "carriage house" over it. On and on. Everything money can buy.

The Steinbergs are "arms manufacturers," also known as gun dealers to the highest bidder. They load a cargo ship with death munitions to some despot in Africa, and send another ship to the country next door that is being attacked. They sell to everyone: Communist, fascist, democratic, autocratic—any country with gold or diamonds.

The Steinbergs live here in the height of ski season, dividing their time through the year with their other many mega-mansions in such places as Aruba, Monte Carlo, Maui, and so on. They went into the ski business with some other trillionaires and made SkiCo, the company that owns all the lifts, lodges, employees, the police, and even the bears that wander town as Brahman cattle do in India. They own from the spit on the sidewalk to the finest jewelry store.

The consortium dumps hundreds of millions a year (before tax dollars) into this 1% playground that is overly opulent and operates at a loss. They can then cancel out any government tax requirement on their gun-running trade. A good year for war? Then build another ski lift, a block of condos with a golf course, and the Congo gold is free and clear.

JC buys the Jewish princess another martini with the wave of his hand. Even though he's down to his last 50 bucks, he acts like he owns the place. He regales the lovely princess with tales of his greatness. The beautiful young lady, who is called Rose, nods in agreement with everything, returning her only answer.

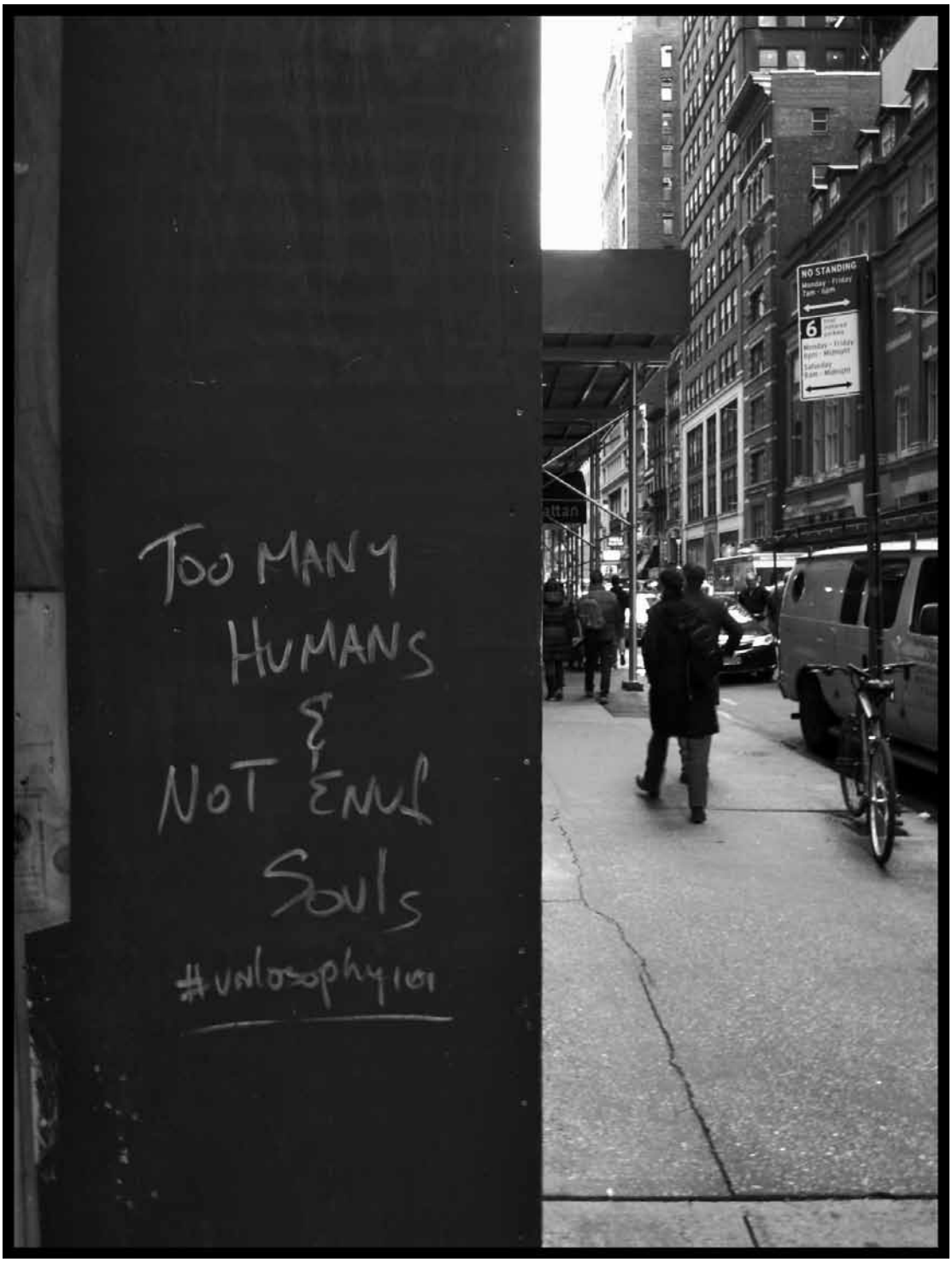
JC says, "I was an art dealer in California, selling Picassos and Pollocks, mostly abstracts, and once in awhile a Winslow Homer."

"Oh, wow!" she says. "Who's Pistachio?"

I have her now, he thinks, and continues out loud, "being a surfing instructor, I was in the Kona curler surfing competition."

"Oh, wow!"

"I came in second for the whole island, only being out-surfed by Kale-laneka, the four-time champion of the last decade."


TOO MANY
HUMANS
&
NOT ENUF
Souls
#unlosophy101
NO STANDING
6

"Oh, wow!"

"Then I decided to come here and teach skiing."

"Gee. Oh, wow!"

JC is a little bored with the vapid response, but is eyeing a delicate ring of cocaine around her left nipple. He wants desperately to lick it off.

"And what do you do here in Aspen, dear Rose?"

"Ski," is all she can elaborate on.

"You know that alkali in the snow can cause skin damage?"

"Oh. I thought snow was pure."

"It is. But I'm talking about the snow you have there," pointing to her nipple.

"Oh no! What should I do?"

"Saliva is the only thing I know of that can neutralize it."

"Really? Can you show me?"

"Yes. Here. I'll show you." He wets his fingers with his lips and gently rubs the spit around the areola. When he hears the first moan, he looks into her eyes that are now half-lidded, taking that as an unspoken "yes." He leans in and suckles the perfect nipple.

More moaning, then—"Oh! Wow!" Her arms wrap around his head drawing him deeper in. Fondling, then kissing, JC accompanies her back to the massive Steinberg castle. They sneak in the "service" door, giggling through the dark hallways to a secret room. The long slow dawn of the mountains rises over their sweaty skins—exuding sex, cocaine, and alcoholic fumes.

iii. The Forgotten District - August 2010

In the center of the world, the Toledo District is also a place farthest from the world. Encased in untamed jungle, with the shallow Caribbean on one side, there is only one 300-mile road into this "forgotten district" of southern Belize.

Tribes of Mayans have lived here since their heyday a thousand years ago, devolving into tiny villages on the ruins of their former temple splendors. Conquerors passed it by as a worthless mangrove swamp; agricultural giants disregarded the limestone upheaval that was land; pirates planted treasure in its offshore cays.

A tiny population of escaped slaves, Confederate war criminals, sugar cane workers from India, mercantile Chinese, and German Mennonites drifted in over the last 200 years. Here they stayed, as there was no further place to go. The road ended there. In recent years, it has attracted disenfranchised white people from around the globe, misfits who could not make it in their societies, and criminals hiding where none would bother to seek them.

In this melting pot of misfits, an internal economy of street markets and neighborhood groceries bumbles along—the Mayans selling jungle fruit, the Chinese rice, the Mennonites chickens and watermelons. The British set up a military post and then abandoned it to the newly independent government of Belize, where it quickly decayed from a lack of enthusiasm and funds. The people in this land are mostly peaceful in their poverty, save for the occasional machete fights on drunken weekends.

The creed of the country is that "no one shall get up on over another." This means that if a villager makes an astounding profit off his neighbors, or a rich man flaunts his wealth, they will be shunned and ostracized from the community. This engenders a social torpidity where no one tries harder than any other, the prices are all the same, and nothing defined as "greatness" in the Western world ever comes to pass.

Thirty miles inland from the sea, at the base of the Maya Mountains, along the banks of the Monkey River, sits the small village of San Marcos, which contains fifty families living close to the Stone Age. This is one of a hundred villages sprinkled in these jungle foothills. The road to here is dirt, as it is all over this land and this community, including the floors of the houses and the one *tienda*. By

the river is a 20x30-foot palm shack. Smoke wafts out through the palm fronds of the walls and roof. The man of the household, Mr. Chok, lounges against a wall chewing a splinter of sugar cane.

He is not reading or conversing. Not playing with the nine kids. Just waiting for nightfall to screw his wife again. Here there is no entertainment as the northern elite know it. No TV. No newspaper. No magazines. No radio. No toys. No games or puzzles. There is only the body. Fondling the wife's body is the finest pasttime, and here Mr. Chok has full license.

If the compliant wife is too busy, then he will abuse himself or more likely one of the children. If he is happy he will only fondle their genitals. If he is mad or depressed, he beats them, from the smallest to the wife. This is not illegal here, nor frowned upon (except by the beaten), nor is it even unexpected. A man of the household can hang a child by the legs from the rafters, beat and molest them, and it's no more important of an issue than a northern family watching *Cheers* on the TV after dinner. It is, after all, their only entertainment. But Nathan Chok has bigger problems than entertainment. His wife, Isabella, is in tears over the sickness of one of her children.

"Nathan, you have to get money today for little Alischa. Her infection is getting worse."

"But here is no work."

"You need to work. We have to get some Cipro."

"I work from sun up to sun down, but there is no money."

"The child will die," she says, choking back a sob. "Go out to the *milpa* [farm]. See if there is any dried ears of corn we can sell in town."

"OK. James, Wendell, Marcia, Benjamin, and Veronica—you come with me."

Nathan goes out of the small thatched hut, the five children trailing behind. The mother stays behind with the sick child and the three others who are under five years old. The oldest of the stay-at-home children chases a duck around on the floor, which is hard packed mud with a sheen of water on it. The duck leaves white puddles of excrement in random splats against the dark earth. The children hug the squawking duck lovingly, then pause to sweep the bird-lice from their arms.

Nathan and two of the kids pause on the edge of their yard to defecate into a swampy spot. There is no hut or privacy. No toilet paper. Just squat, go, yank up the pants, and on to elsewhere. Everyone has hookworm. The smaller children are slightly brain damaged by this, but this seems not a matter of concern. Hookworm only travels six feet from the pile but, given the distribution of scat, this covers the entire yard. The entire village.

A visiting northern health official tells them that if a six-foot-deep hole was dug for toilet use, the worms would not be able to get out and the ground infection would be over.

Four years later, the hole is still not dug. When Nathan is asked why not, he replies: "Why should I bust my ass on that hole when we don't go anywhere and, if such a big thing, then an NGO will dig it for us, and buy us the out-house too. So we'll wait for that."

"But you are living in a disease-ridden environment."

"We have always lived like this.'

"The worms control your mind. You've become brain damaged."

"We don't notice. We think we are smart."

"So you will do nothing?"

"We will help the NGO when they get here."

"Are they coming?"

"Not that I've heard."

"But, but, *whaaa* . . . ?"

Nathan and the kids head into the dry cornfield, whose plants are only chest high. A few town pigs follow them to the edge of the milpa. These full grown hogs have names and families. They wander aimlessly all through the village and the houses, taking what they want when they can get it. Women pound their backs with palm brooms, shooing them back out into the street.

"Get back, Kuk'n. Get away! Go dig up Penelope Tule's yard. Go home!" one of Nathan's sons

yells, venturing a kick at the black and pink pig, with whom who he is at eye level. Grunting, the beast hurries away.

In the milpa there are more than a few runty corn ears scattered about that were not picked the first time. These they break off and load into used rice sacks. Three half-bags are brought back to the thatched shack. "We will send Benjamin and Veronica to town to the market and see if they can sell this corn," says Isabella, breastfeeding one child, another on her lap, and another peering around her back. "We should be able to get a dollar a sack."

A dollar is enough to get some knock-off Cipro to fight the infant's infection. Western pharmaceutical companies donate container-loads of standard medicine to be given out for free to the impoverished masses. Most of these pills are a few grains off the advertised dose, so it is to the benefit of the company to dispose of them here, as they might be sued for product inconsistency in the north. The drug companies get to write off twice the full price of the pills against their tax profits. The Mayans get nearly free medicine—except for the commerce sharks who have wheezed between the corporations and the villages with bribes as "transports." The sharks charge some pennies each for the free pills.

The dried corn-ears are shuffled into one full bag for Benjamin, and a half bag for his little sister. The mother makes arrangements with "Jimmy the bus driver." Jimmy is a local fellow who saved every penny he ever made to buy this half-alive elementary school bus. The seats are tiny, but still three abreast can be mashed in.

The fare to town is 25 cents, but even that cash output is too much for the Chok family. The kids are allowed on the bus for a one-way ride. This is a favor to the mother, who has given "favors" to Jimmy in the past. Favors are the only active currency in the village; the body, so adaptable and reusable, is an obvious choice to negotiate with. Nathan Chok negotiates with his labor and endurance to chop endless acres of jungle. Mrs. Chok negotiates with the only thing she has of value (to some).

The Jimmy Bus rolls out of the dusty village road with the children in one of the tiny seats, their bags of dried corn on their lap. Some chickens run in the aisle, escaped from their cage. A Mayan woman craps from under her dress into a rice sack in the seat behind them. *How much*, the children wonder, *will she get for that in town*?

The bus windows are stuck closed, and it is hot and smelly. Drapes of bedspread fringe dangle with Styrofoam dice along the walls. A large picture of Jesus is at the front of the bus, which is needed to pray, given the way Jimmy drives. He hauls down on the horn, as though he was an angel blowing the trumpet of Jericho, rather than a brash creature of the jungle.

iv. Dreams of Belize - February 2008

In the bathroom of the bar, someone left a magazine for the pent up to examine. It's an obscure magazine called *Herpetology Today*. JC sits down, to read—his other office. It's early afternoon and he's onto the third cup of coffee. Not much going on around the bar. A few ancients staring into their glasses of beer, cute women cleaning tables, arranging napkins or hot sauce. Here is not even any music to be heard coming from the jukebox.

JC sits and relives himself. Shitting is not really cool in any way. There's never been a TV commercial touting the wonder of crapping, beautiful anal maidens, the euphoric release for overly hairy men. No. None of that. Shit has not, nor will ever likely be, a tony topic of discussion.

Hence, JC has come here for that unmentioned but all-important act of the day—to get rid of what went in yesterday. Cannot be done at the domicile of the lovely lady. Everything so clean, the bathroom looks like the kitchen. The gagging smells of what JC will produce will befoul the air of the entire luxury apartment.

No way will he befoul that place, taking the light from the still-enamored eyes of the lovely lady. One brown cloud wafting through the rooms will kill that. Get that shit outta here and into an anonymous public bathroom. Of course, hers doesn't smell. Unclear if such a beauty even defecates at

all. Even if it could be proven that she does, it's a sure bet that it smells like ice cream.

JC abstractedly leafs through the magazine at first, and then becomes engaged in an article about crocodiles along the Mosquito Coast. Seems they do not really know much about these creatures. Many are seen along the mouths of rivers, lazily merging with the sea. Mothers terrorize the children with stories of crocs making a lunch out of the brown babies.

When JC reads the author's conclusion—that a research center needs to be instituted there—his brows furrow, he holds his breath till he turns red and, with a push, he plops in a sigh of relief. *Ha! Pinched a loaf, laid a trout,* he chuckles to himself.

But what an idea! A crocodile research center in the tropics. This he could do. In this, he would be the expert, the hero, the herpetologist. An incubator of herpetological science.

Besides that, crocodiles are really cool. They're deadly. Super dangerous. Only experts have anything to do with them. You can always eat them, or sell the skins, so there's really no down side to having a farm of the buggers.

JC brings the magazine out to the bar for further study. A breakfast beer settles his excitement and revitalizes him with its carbohydrates and alcohol. He pours through every word in excitement. *This is it!* he thinks. *This is the mission I've been looking for.*

JC spends the rest of the day blithering the possibilities with the barmaid Stella. She admits that it was her father who left the magazine in the bathroom. JC gets more and more excited talking to Stella, who describes crocodile captures in Florida as a kid, trailing behind her herpetologist father.

She says that the first thing that must be done is to clamp the jaws shut. A lasso has to be expertly cast over the muzzle, and then pulled tight all at once. This is called "noosing." When the chiclets of the beast are secured, the crocodile will go wild trying to escape. Here is where true macho comes into play. The capturer has to hold onto the noose, which is secured to a pole, for an hour or more, until the croc tires out and is docile enough to land on shore or beside a boat. Then it can be tied more securely, so that it does not thrash out of its confining lines.

In this process of "tiring out," the person can become weak and be overpowered by the croc's attempts to escape. If pulled into the boat too soon, the action may capsize the boat, making the hunter . . . the hunted.

"Oh my god," says JC to the barmaid. "This sounds like fun squared. I can hold onto these flailing assholes. Go ahead and fight, I got time and plenty of moxie. No gator will escape my grasp."

Stella is more than a little bit skeptical, but she only smiles and encourages JC in his new found obsession. "Crocs," she says, "not gators."

Another couple of "breakfast beers," and the newly minted herpetologist borrows a computer and sets into researching everything about crocodiles. Types. Where they are. Hand capture versus nets. Various types of harpoons including "sustainable" harpoons that only penetrate the croc hide deep enough to hold on and reel the monster in. Then there are regulations on croc harvest, humane croc treatment, safe handling, and transport. Non-disturbance and limitations on crocodile abuse.

"*Bullshit all*. Nobody actually gives a shit if these dinosaurs are abused or not. Like, how are you going to abuse a 800-pound creature with enough teeth to eat a buffalo in five minutes? A skin thicker than a Goodyear tire, and enough muscle to win any wrestling contest on Planet Earth? No. Not a big panic program. If I catch the croc in two pieces, that's good enough. I wanna go croc fishing with grenades," JC announces to a wide-eyed Stella.

"Besides, in Belize there are no laws," he arrogantly announces.

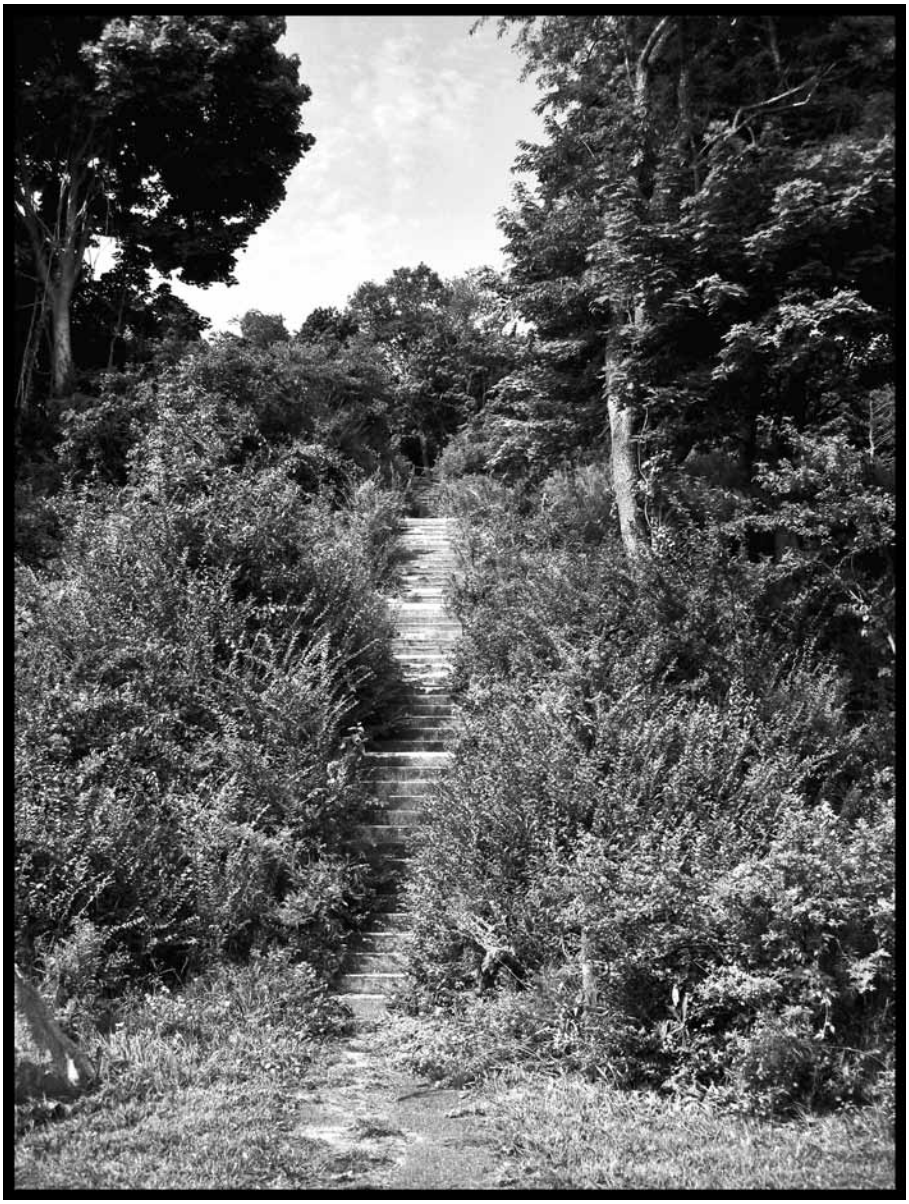
JC studies for five hours until the late afternoon. This is the longest act of concentration that the flim-flam man has ever accomplished. He is fascinated. Excited at the prospects of the future. Ready to tear off on the new venture.

But, first . . . first he must consolidate his status here in Aspen. Here he must worm and wheedle his way next to the money for the grandest adventure of his life. He must be all that this elitist environment expects him to be. He must be the adventurer that all the elitists want to be in their

secret hearts, but are too chicken to pursue themselves.

Then they will finance him in the wildest dream, the wildest excitement, if only they can share the excitement and energy vicariously. Make them also feel the glory of being . . . **The Crocodile King of Belize.**

* * * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Many Musics

Eleventh Series

"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."
—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

lii. Carnival Room

Soap bubbles. *I remember now.*
I woke that night in my bedchamber
 to soap bubbles floating around
  me in the window's moonlight.
Raised my finger to pop one & heard
 a moment of music. Popped more &
  each time a pretty *ting*! Like music
   released, & then gone.

Then I raised up quick when I saw
 more at the foot of my bed, found
  they liked to be popped several
   at once, many of my fingers as I could,
    like an instrument. I followed, popped & played.

Until I was at the wall opposite
 my bed & saw whence they'd come.
  A hole in the wall, round, smooth
   at its edges, like twas always there,
    like waiting my middle-night notice?

I followed, kept popping the bubbles,
 like this was part of the magick. Listened
  too. The bubble music was being faintly
   replied to, a singing in kind, were these
    bubbles his? I was in a tunnel now,
     not dark but faintly glowing. No fear.

The music nearer, I learned its Singer's moods
 & modulations. Sometimes sounded gay,
  sometimes tragic, but it never ceased
   now, & became my path to follow,
    when a fork to choose, when unsure.

The music led me to the White Bunny,
who was waiting for me by a long
curving stretch down. Her glowing
fur bright in the tunnel's murk,
her mesmerizing eyes & pink nose
steady upon me. Long furry ears, slim torso.

She was close with the music too, like there
was a *hmmming* she shared with the Singer,
how they spoke, how she knew to wait
for me. She sniffed me twice & slow
hopping led me along. I tried *hmmming*
too & found it sometimes made all
this seem clearer, friendlier.

She showed me how to travel the
tunnels, how to sniff for the unknown,
how to *hmmm* for direction, near
friends. How to remember without words,
feel deeper these places as between us
something shared grew.

It was many dreams before I found
the bones & grit to remember one to the next.
Before I remembered on waking where
I'd been, & that I'd been many times before.
Until then, the bubbles would lead me
to the hole, the music would take me
to the White Bunny. Hop, sniff, *hmmm,* wake.

Then the first time I spoke to her upon our meeting.
"Where do you live? Would you take me there?"
She studied me closely for a long dream's time.
Then turned & hopped away, faster & faster,
a blur I somehow followed. Then we arrived.

The Great Cavern seemed like the center
of the world to me. Or close to it.
I could not see its roof up there high,
only study the Great Tree's heightless
height up there. Only feel like
the Great Tree's roots might lead
to even greater.

I met the White Bunny's fellow Creatures
one by one, many more dreams the doing.
They were shy & yet it felt like they
knew, or expected, me. I . . . belonged to them
in a way I had never felt before. Truth
with no how or why.

All admired the gnattering little imp,
like a tiny black & white pandy bear with
crazy laughing eyes, her strange play
with objects, now this, now that,
now here? now gone!

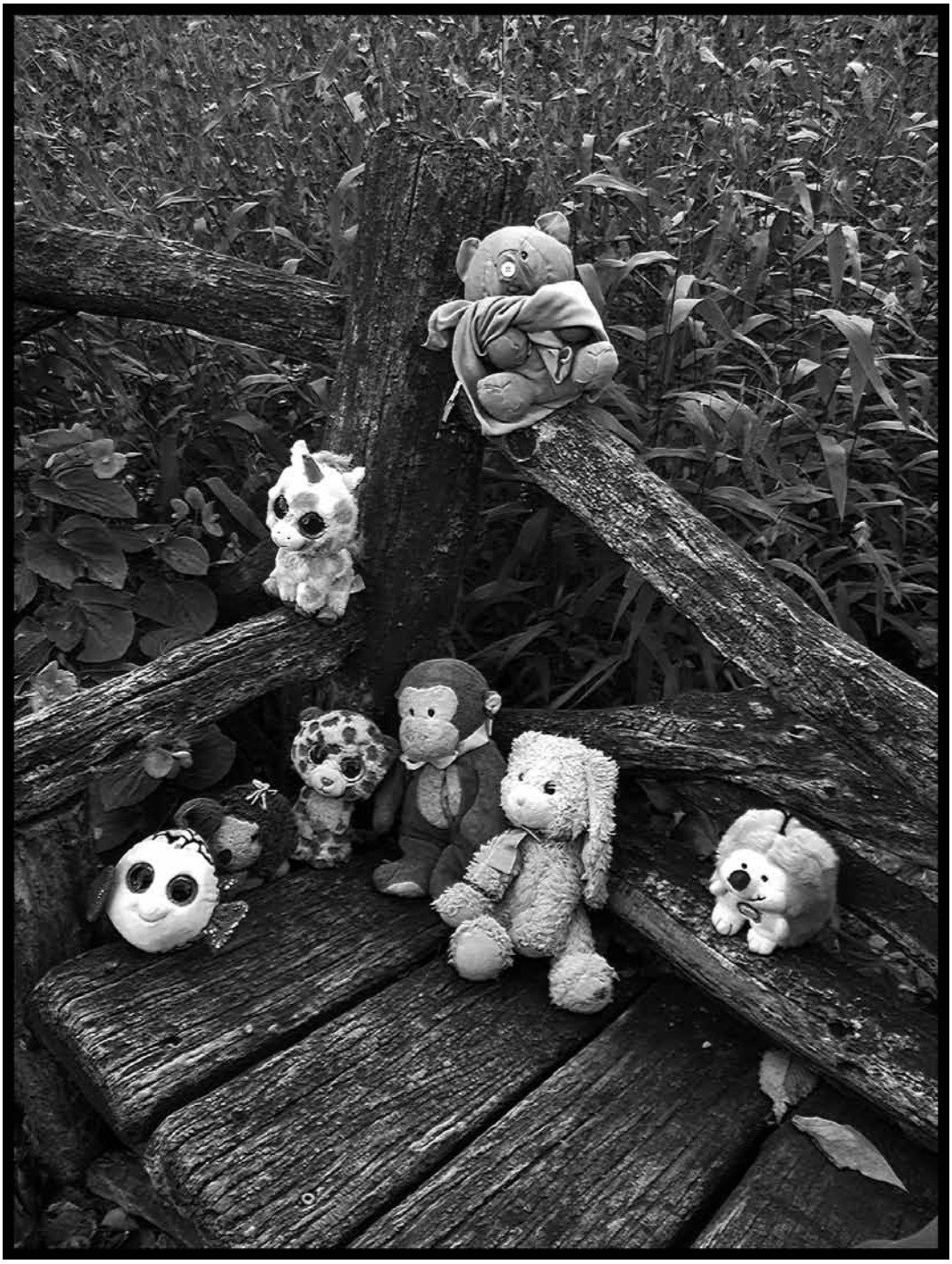
But her tricks ran deeper, like a wise
funny book written on the water,
finished in the air. She seemed
both the most ancient & yet
most new of them all. Would sit peaceably
in my palm, lazily gnawing, & then
a sudden wild cackle & away!

So many friends to meet & know.
Pretty little giraffes clustered in
my lap to nap. Handsome dancing
bears in hats & bowties, leaping
from small stones to larger boulders,
among shadows high high & low low.

Each time I climbed through the hole,
& followed the musical bubbles, the White
Bunny waited me. Yet she could not
lead me to the Singer, could not
explain who or what he was. My
friends simply accepted him as so.

His voice was always in our
songs, sometimes our laughter,
even the gnattering little imp would
seem to play & teach among his music.
I sometimes heard his echo in my
waking hours, distantly, like the
morning tide of the Wide Wide Sea.

I wished to thank him for bringing
me here, gifting me all these friends,
this whole beautiful world. So gathered
all of my friends together in the
Great Cavern. White Bunny, imp, giraffes,
bears. Hedgedyhog, hummingbird, turtle who
isn't a turtle. So many more known,
napped with, *hmmm'd* with. Because of
this unseen friend.



"We must make him a gift, &
find a way to give it him." They all
listened me closely when I spoke,
like human language spooked them deep,
& yet loved me. Finger on my chin,
I wondered, *what gift?*

"Find me a small box, the color of the
Wide Wide Sea. For next time we visit."

With a few magickal waking words I
borrowed from the Architect (he had
so many!), this beautiful little box
they found for me would be most protected.
My friends gathered strange little stones,
rough little jewels, pretty nuts, feathers.

With the White Bunny, gnattering little imp,
& the turtle who isn't a turtle, we traveled
for many of my dreams, listening closely,
nearing him, then not so near to him.
I grew to fear will would not be enough
to find him, despaired a little. His
music we followed grew despairing too.

Then I sniffed twice, took a leap, & suddenly laughed.
The Singer joined me, merry sudden too,
as did my friends. Laughing became
a happy song, a song of finding, a song
of gifts. We hurried, we slowed, no rules
for finding him. *He did not know where
he was. We sang. We gnattered too. We neared.*

I felt us very close now, we all did,
the music filled us whole but, still,
not quite. I sniffed twice, took a
sudden leap again, & began to sing.
"There is a door. And now we pass through!
There is a door! And now we pass through!"

And so we arrived the Carnival Room,
the root of the music, its Tower, its starcraft.

*One had to look around like singing.
One had to listen close like singing.
One had to walk like singing, sniff like singing,
& always keep singing,* or one found
one's self back in an ordinary tunnel,
& the singing close & elsewhere like always.

So much to see, a feast of wonders:
vast, deep mirrors, with shifting tales
writ on them—doors hung high
upon walls, & other places they would
lead—a painting of a great wheeled
carriage on rails—& when I sang &
laughed & gnattered my best, there were
two exotic brothers, one playing a stringless
guitar, the other dancing with a blue
castle upon his head, their songs
joining our laughter, & the general gnattering,
& the Singer's happy cries. *Many, one, none.*

The Singer, I finally learned, could only be
found in this way, not a solid form,
but by habitation. *He was his many musics*,
& those he shared, & this was his function,
& this was his happiness. In my many
childly dreams, I no longer question this.
It was answer enough.

Now feeling like I am far from those
childly dreams, & yet, I listen for his
musics, any note or quiver of them. The rooms
I pass through grow larger & larger,
sometimes empty, sometimes furniture
the size of mountains. Always a glowing murk,
no sound but my hurrying feet.

I try to remember the songs, just one,
but they elude me. We sang so many,
& many times over. *Just one.* Nothing.

Then . . . *music*! but not his music. Instruments.
A squeeze box, two fiddlers. I come
to a room of more familiar size again,
dark but noisy. I follow the music,
I croak, then croon, then *hmmm* with it.
Now a . . . platform above rails, like the
picture from the Carnival Room!
It is close, but I look for the musicians.

They are indeed three. An old man with
a mess of hair, in a long grey coat,
playing the sunniest day on the
many yellowed keys of his grimy
old squeeze box. The fiddlers, tall,
thin, dressed in faded harlequin
rags, dancing & playing with eyes closed.
They do not notice me. I listen.

Then, I begin to dance. Not just
to dance like remembering. The years
fall away completely & I am
dancing with all of me. Dance like
laughing, dance like gnattering,
dance like singing under the big moon,
under none. I dance like the tides
of the Wide Wide Sea, like the tallest
birches, like everything I can conjure.

I forget the where & what of it all,
forget to sniff twice, leap, & know.
I dance back my years to far away
unknown places, maybe other worlds,
& dance on to the many I will become,
& know in other times.

As the roar of the great wheeled
carriage escalates, I return,
as best I can. The musicians have
finished too, & gaze me quietly.

I am arrived, finally, at this moment
of my self, this perpetuity. *I am ready.*

* * * * * *

liii. The Run-On of Time

There is travel here I do not understand,
brutal speed, like hours & miles need
more than tame, *they muse be flayed.*
This carriage speeds wildly through my mind
& for a long moment my eyes remain shut.

What I see inly is a flat brown landscape.
Then a windowless house & its still
vaguely clutched barn.
The house's unseen side faces that cold
dusk without a wall. I am standing
on that side now, unheated by
smudge of sun stuck on its hard,
gray, empty sky.
Hint of snowy hills & trees in the distance?

A breath by my ear & a memory nudged,
old one. The Architect's son.

We were kept apart in the Tower, faces
 in the stone staircase guarded
  his distance from me. But one time,
 when I reacted as a silly girl,
not an empathetic person.

I was left alone, as rare, & no stones
 presumed to forbid my Tower explorings.
I found him in his chamber,
 & a thousand candles lit. A music
low, like the shadows themselves made.

At first I could not see him.
"You're beautiful," his breath by my ear,
 a hand on my cheek. Eyes more stars
  than boy's.

I say nothing but drift away,
 wonder at the spare, low, soft
  furniture. A dim crouch of a room.

Again, the breath near.
"Are you scared?"
I wait.
"I wished you belonged to me instead,
 but neither of us is of this world anyway."

Another breath, with pressing fingers
 this time, & I'm tumbled into an embrace,
  gently pressed & touched in a muddled
   nest of a couch. Explored. A warm
  ache in it. A lonely insist.

Touched high & low, strangely, I am
 not scared. Just the wrong hands
  to heat me.
Stranger still, when he for a moment
 presses my thighs open like to push
  himself in, but there is nothing.
   Nothing there between his.

I am shocked. It's what they are.
Why they do what they do. What
little I know of coupling, them clumsy
green things hungering toward
the shine of our bodies.
Even my Architect. Even the King my father.
I know little but these much.
I laugh. His trick on me?
But he falls away, cries out,
is gone. I return to the
Architect's office. Say nothing.
Best how this works.

Carriage shudders, whines, pushes
me back to my mind's weird window.
Now an old temple out there, steeple
fallen half in it. I walk closer.

An old gravestone, its ancient blooms
hung on it. A patch of end summer
dandelions. Then a set of steps
to no building, sleeping retired
in tall grass, top step broken
like the last climber panicked
to find no door, no house, nothing.
I climb these steps, wade among
their bed & climb up, & close my eyes
deeper & come to the house & its barn.

Broken windows, snows drifted into
bedroom, onto the blank mattress.
I sit. It's soft. I push away the layer
of snow & lay back. The ceiling's
many stars like others I remember,

sloop me in, a thirsty dream drinks
down its dreamer.

Stars. Your eyes. Your soft strange
face. You on this cosmic carriage
with me. Real enough.

I smile. "You're beautiful too."
His look is inscrutable, waiting.
"You were giving me a clue."
He nods.
"Are we from . . . the same place?"
"I think so."
"Is that where we're going?"

His smile is sad & leaving.
"Only a message. They will think you
 something else & try to claim you."

I nod. "I'm sorry."
"I wish I had kissed you. Just to know."

I am alone again on this carriage
 as it marauds its path through
  hours & miles. Nothing now to see
 through its windows, eyes closed or no.
I wait. Whatever this is, whatever I am.

I drift. Near to dream. A ragged man smiles me close. Holds my hand.

The carriage arrives to daylight & I am
 awake from lost time. I hear shouts,
crowds. "She is here! She saves us!
 She is here!"

There are many, they are pale, they live
 in this high cavern. They dream
  to heal the world. They are failing.

I am the waited legend.
The first to cross the Dreaming from ago.
As I am shown their gleaming Sleep
 Capsules each inhabits most hours of
  every day, the brew each drinks
   to navigate, I wish to comfort
  more than I can. I find myself
 sniffing twice, to know this better,
to understand.

They wonder how I solved the world's
 greatest riddle, how to heal not history
  but hearts. Crowd around me
   to listen, know the magick unique
    thing they think I am.

Press closer. Wonder why I delay.
"There isn't time. *There isn't time.*
 You came. *You were promised.*"

I feel compelled toward a
 Sleep Capsule. Undecorated within,
  unlike most, save for what looks
   like a single white shell.
    There isn't time.

At the moment I set to fight,
 to run, there is a roar through
  the cavern, the millennia, *everywhere, always.*

* * * * * *

liv. Tendering

We sit together waiting, purple
 thread slack in my hand.
And we learn one another better.
I push myself not to think, not to feel,
 not to be, solely like a man.

She left me with them, like a sniff
 of her approval, me to them, & so
  they resume their studies of what
 I am, this time more tender,
  taking turns because I am slower,
   can only reck one by one.

The White Bunny hops into my lap,
  &, like before, her calm yet mesmering
    scrutiny of me. She tenders my hands,
  shows me their pain, shows me the history
 of my pain in my fingers, spreads them
out straight, to my whimpers.

Shows me their beauty, a thing I could
 not have imagined. And now I do
  & am changed. It hurts. I whimper.
 But she lets me cradle her, & feel
what flows bright & tender between us.
 The touch. The *hmmm.*

I groan. I rest.

Then the gnattering little imp compels
 me to crouch low, impossibly low,
  to her level, & gnatter too.
 She click-clicks & noise-noises, cackles
merrily & enters my mind again. She now
 begins to do her tendering adjustments.

Closely, gently, not just to open me
 wide within, expose my all, but to
  scour out the rot from my long years
 among men, their ways & wars.
She is old as this world, or nearly so,
 & finds it funny still, dark & tragic & funny.

The turtle not a turtle goes last, &
 I expect another lesson, a hard or soft
  tendering. I'm humble, I'm ready,
   I'm glad, but he falls asleep in my lap,
    & I let myself too.

We cluster in dream together, & he brings
  me to where she would visit them,
   deep in this Tangled Gate, in a
  cavern below it. I am walking upright
 now, next to this friend. I am clear.
I am tendered. I see the Red Bag, &
 understand *this* is what they were
  tendering me *for*, leading me *to*,
   reminding me *of.*

This is who I am. No more denial.
This is what I must do. I nod.

I wake & they are all in my lap,
 like my oldest, dearest friends,
  never before had. We sniff once hello,
 gnatter a joke or two between us,
  & then the tug of the thread
   in my hand.

We go together now, something in
 this that is me leading.
We will find you.
We will protect you.

When we arrive to the thread-tied tree,
 box of colored threads buried below, I *know*,
  I am *clear*, I sit down with
 these friends of yours & now mine,
& do what I hadn't thought to do.
 I braid the remaining colored threads
  together, close & tight, all of us
   clustered near & *hmmming* as I braid.

The braided thread is much longer now,
 glows powerfully like a rainbow
  end to end arcing the sky.
 This line will not run out, I know
that now. The box I stow in my cloak,
 & I retie this braided thread to
   the tree's branch.

We will find you.
We will protect you.

I was wrong before, that you were
 the thread out of time. We share
  this among us, with these colored
   tools, the trees, these Creatures,
  the Gate. We will do this
 task together. Save this world
together. *Learn how together*.

* * * * * *

Jimmy Heffernan

Notes on the Arts & Culture

"Surfers are the 'throw-aheads' of mankind, not the dregs; they aren't the black sheep of humanity, but the futurists, and they are leading the way to where man ultimately wants to be. The act of the ride is the epitome of 'be here now', and the tube ride is the most acute form of that. Which is: your future is right ahead of you, the past is exploding behind you, your wake is disappearing, your footprints are washed from the sand. It's a non-productive, non-depletive act that's done purely for the value of the dance itself. And that is the destiny of man."
—Timothy Leary

Stalker (1979) by Andrei Tarkovsky

Stalker, by Russian auteur-director Andrei Tarkovsky, is one of the more challenging, interesting, and original films I've seen in quite awhile. Despite a very low budget, his filmmaking skill keeps one interested and engaged as the movie unfolds.

The premise is that, a few years before, an unusual meteorite fell and struck Russian soil, creating what would later be called "the Zone." The Zone is a kind of ethereal, supernatural area in which very mysterious and mystical things happen. Most people will not go anywhere near it—out of fear—but there are certain people who volunteer as guides to take people through the Zone to the "Room." These guides are called Stalkers, because, in a very shamanic way, they must find the proper path through the Zone to the Room, as one cannot simply go in a straight line. The presence of the Zone forbids an easy approach.

Anyway, the movie consists of the journey three men take (a Stalker, a scientist, and a writer) toward the Room in the middle of the Zone. It is in this room that one attains full enlightenment, a state of bliss in which the beings of the Zone will grant any desire, no matter how grand, and teach people about their innermost natures by laying bare the recesses of their subconscious minds. This journey does not consist of any special effects, or any high-budget tech wizardry at all, and Tarkovsky is brilliant at maintaining a steady state of psychological tension and engagement.

The film touches at various times on Buddhist enlightenment and reincarnation, the Jesus of the Gospels, man's inhumanity to man, mysticism and the supernatural, a heavy dose of philosophy and more. In any case, it is definitely a special movie, and I give it a 10/10.

* * *

My Top 15 Books / _The Devil's Dictionary_ by Ambrose Bierce

Here are my current Top 15 books:

1. *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906) by Ambrose Bierce
2. *Cities of the Red Night* (1981) by William S. Burroughs

3. *VALIS* (1981) by Philip K. Dick
4. *Prometheus Rising* (1983) by Robert Anton Wilson
5. Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe
6. *The Game of Life or Info-Psychology* (1979) by Timothy Leary
7. *Hamlet* (1602?) by William Shakespeare
8. *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad
9. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980) by David Bohm
10. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972) by Hunter S. Thompson
11. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) by Ernest Hemingway
12. *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov
13. *Dune* (1965) by Frank Herbert
14. *Childhood's End* (1953) by Arthur C. Clarke
15. *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

My #1 is *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce because from about the age of 18 to about the age of 25, no book shaped my thoughts and views, and taught me about the world, more than it did. I also think it contains the finest American writing I've ever seen. I still have the original Dover Thrift edition my parents got me for Christmas in 1999, though it is rather in tatters.

From *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce:

(Female, n.): n. One of the opposing, or unfair, sex.

The Maker, at Creation's birth,
With living things had stocked the earth.
From elephants to bats and snails,
They all were good, for all were males.
But when the Devil came and saw
He said: "By Thine eternal law
Of growth, maturity, decay,
These all must quickly pass away
And leave untenanted the earth
Unless Thou dost establish birth"—
Then tucked his head beneath his wing
To laugh—he had no sleeve—the thing
With deviltry did so accord,
That he'd suggested to the Lord.
The Master pondered this advice,
Then shook and threw the fateful dice
Wherewith all matters here below
Are ordered, and observed the throw;
Then bent His head in awful state,
Confirming the decree of Fate.
From every part of earth anew

The conscious dust consenting flew,
While rivers from their courses rolled
To make it plastic for the mould.
Enough collected (but no more,
For niggard Nature hoards her store)
He kneaded it to flexible clay,
While Nick unseen threw some away.
And then the various forms He cast,
Gross organs first and finer last;
No one at once evolved, but all
By even touches grew and small
Degrees advanced, till, shade by shade,
To match all living things He'd made
Females, complete in all their parts
Except (His clay gave out) the hearts.
"No matter," Satan cried; "with speed
I'll fetch the very hearts they need"—
So flew away and soon brought back
The number needed, in a sack.
That night earth rang with sounds of strife—
Ten million males each had a wife;
That night sweet Peace her pinions spread
O'er Hell—ten million devils dead!

* * *

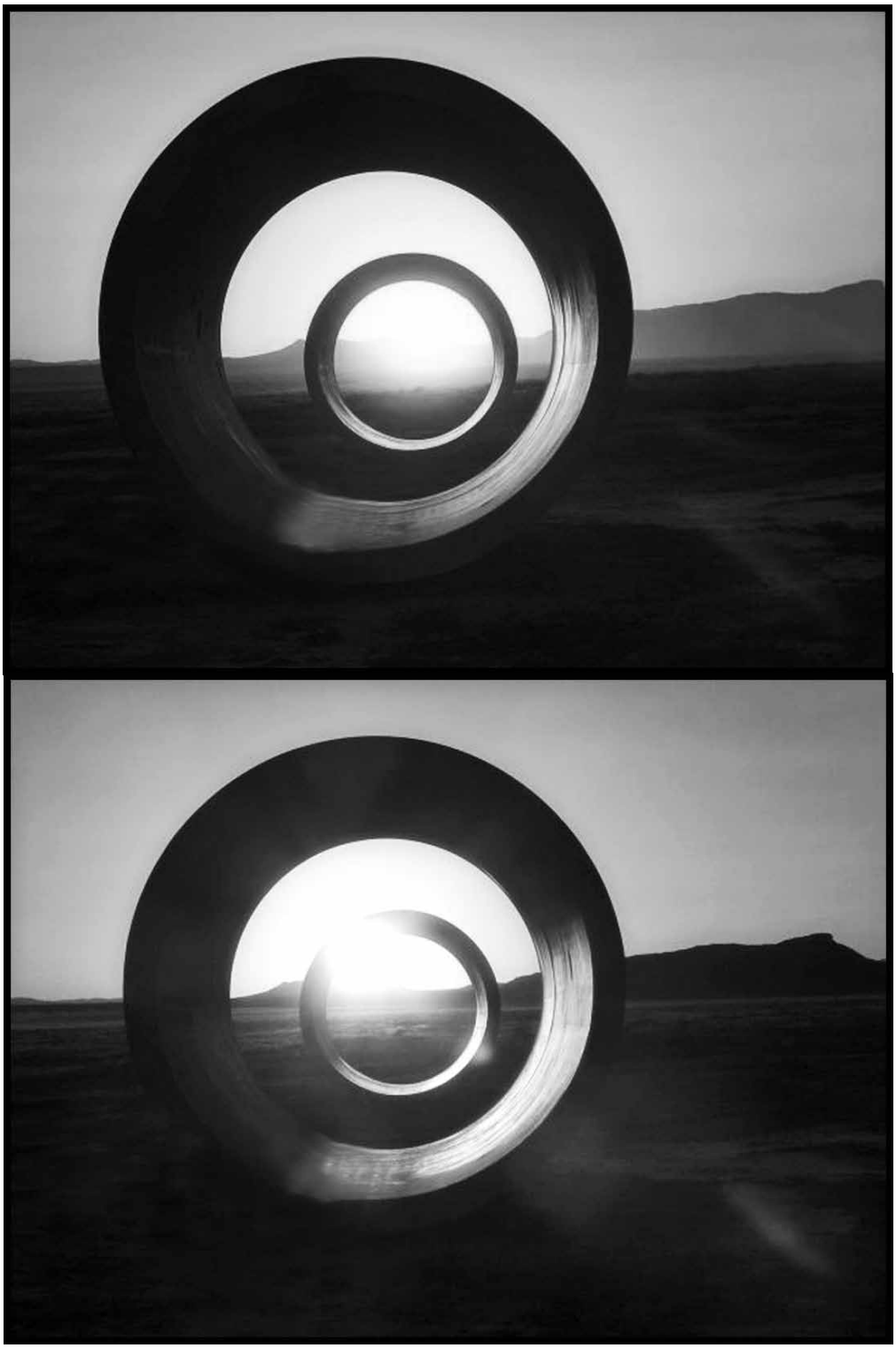
***Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad**

The best book I've read recently is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (also on my current Top 15 books list), whose essence is very well captured by Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*. It gets to the darker aspects of our natures, and of civilization by extension, in a way that is not really describable—I feel that Joseph Conrad was one of those rare writers who could transcend language with his writing. And English wasn't even his first language!

The horror of that place at the center of our psyche, which could just as easily topple one into insanity as keeping one on an even keel, is front and center to this novella's theme, and Conrad points out that this fundamental attribute of the individual has been amplified into entire civilizations—which have historically done some things that are, as he says, not very pretty.

The aforementioned movie is quite possibly the best screen adaptation of a book I've ever seen, capturing the entire thrust, feel, and aura of the book, and in a different and original way that stands quite on its own. I highly recommend both.

* * *



Courtesy of Jimmy Heffernan

Utah Sun Tunnels (1976) by Nancy Holt

This work consists of four massive concrete tunnels (18 feet long and nine feet in diameter), which are arranged in an "X" configuration to total a length of 86 feet (26 m). Each tunnel reacts to the sun differently, aligned with the sunrise and sunset of the summer or winter solstice. Approaching the work, which can be seen one to one-and-a-half miles away, the viewer's perception of space is questioned as the tunnels change views as a product of their landscape.

The top of each tunnel has small holes, forming on each, the constellations of Draco, Perseus, Columba, and Capricorn, respectively. The diameters of the holes differ in relation to the magnitude of the stars represented. These holes cast spots of daylight in the dark interiors of the tunnels, which appear almost like stars. Holt said of the tunnels, "It's an inversion of the sky/ground relationship—bringing the sky down to the earth."
—*Wikipedia*

These pictures were taken by me on the summer solstice around the year 2000. This site is extremely rural. One drives about a hundred miles from Salt Lake to Wendover, and then turns north on a dirt and gravel road for about forty miles, before reaching the site, which has a population of zero.

It was sort of surreal. Pulling up in the car, they didn't look like much—just four concrete pipes. But at the exact moment of the solstice, it was pretty amazing. This place is absolutely in the middle of nowhere. It was a very interesting and powerful vibe. I'm not sure it would be as enjoyable for the winter solstice driving through a foot of snow, however!

* * * * * *

Courtesy of Jimmy Heffernan

Joe Ciccone

Where My Poems Come From

For no good reason I hear one phrase
and then another

and find myself asking someone if
if what I've written down is correct

but only sometimes
does someone answer back.

* * *

Beneath Mars

At last it is tomorrow
With a new sun

Drying the midnight dew
Which fell like rain

On yesterday's purple grapes
Still good enough to eat

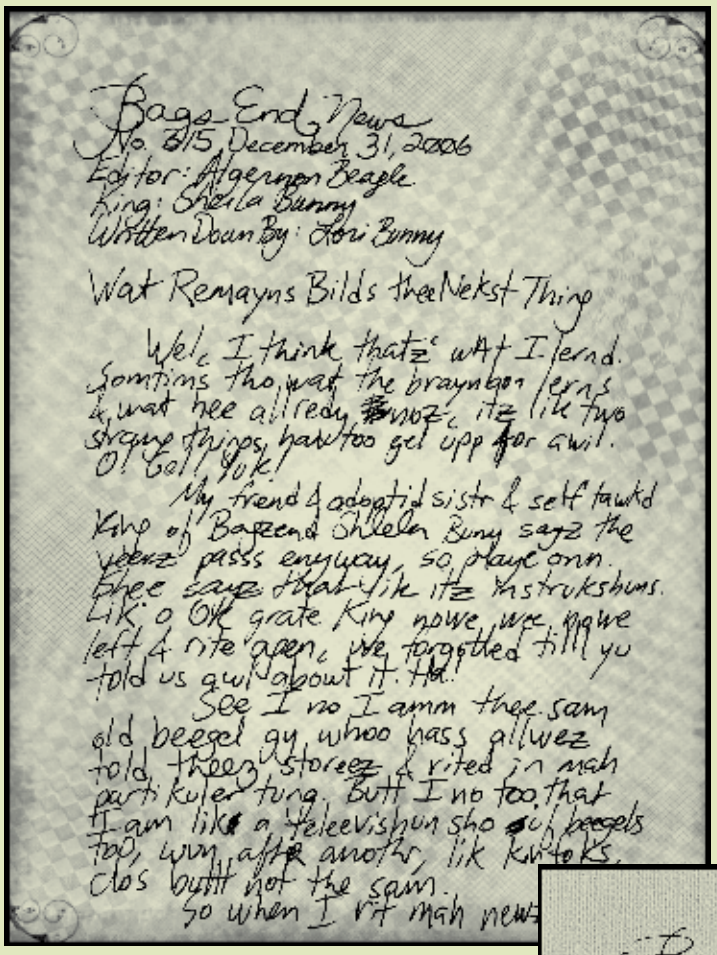
* * *

My Island

Although high and dry
through asphalt decades,

I was really living
on one peculiar island.

* * * * * *



Bagg End News
No. 815, December 31, 2006
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

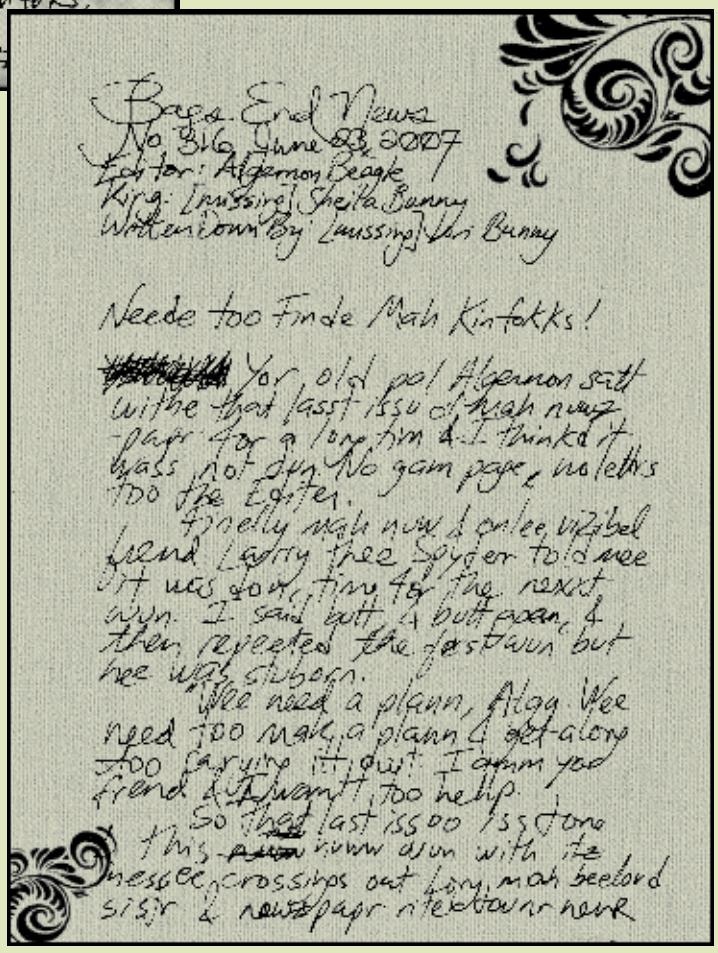
Wat Remayns Bilds thee Nekst Thing

Wel, I think thatz wAt I lernd. Somtims tho wat the braynbox lernz & wat hee all redy knoz, itz like two strayne things, hav too get upp for awil. O! Bal! Yuk!

My friend & adoptid sistr & self tawkd King of Baggend Sheila Bunny sayz the yeerz passs enyway, so playe onn. Thee sayz that, yik itz instrukshuns. Lik o OK grate King nowe, wee haave left 4 rite naen, ive forgotted till yu told us qwi about it. Ha!

See I no I amm thee sam old beegel gy whoo hass allwez told thee storeez & rited in mah partikuler tung. Butt I no too that I am like a teleevishun sho of beegels too, wun after another, lik kwiteks. Clos butt not the sam.

So when I rit mah news



Bagg End News
No 816, June 23, 2007
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: [missing] Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: [missing] Lori Bunny

Neede too Finde Mah Kinfokks!

[illegible] Yor old pa! Algernon sett withe that lasst issu of mah nuz-papr for a lon tim & I thinka it wass not dyn. No gam page, no letrs too the Editer.

Proelly mah nuw & onlee, wizzbel frend Larry thee Spyder told mee it wes tow, time for the nexxt wun. I said butt & butt again, & then repeeted the fastwun but hee wuz stuborn.

Wee need a plann, Algy. Wee need too mak a plann & not alow too Garyne it quit. I amm yor frend & I want, too help.

So that last issoo / ss too no this nuww wun with the messee crossings out Lory, mah beelord sisir & newspapr riteektour nevr

Bags End Book #11: Algernon Beagle Wakes Up! Part 2

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

******

What Remains Builds the Next Thing

Well, I think that's what I learned. Sometimes, tho, what the brainbone learns & what he already knows, it's like 2 things that have to gel up 4or awhile. O Gel! Yuk!

Mah friend & adopted sister & self-talked King of Bags End Sheila Bunny says, "the years pass anyway, so play on." She says that like, "O great King, thankee, now we know left & right again! We 4orgotted till you told us all about it!" Ha!

See, I know I am the same old beagle guy who has always tolded these stories & writed in mah particular tongue. But I know too that I am like a television show of beagles too, one episode after another, like kinfolks, close but not the same.

So when I write mah newspaper, it's like the next episode of these kinfolks is the star. What remains builds the next thing.

No, I didn't talk like that. That's not how I say mah words. I keep to the easier part of the alphabet.

That's how mah dear friend Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna talks. She's smart & she likes me. That's 2 points, or maybe give 1 back depending on how you score beagles. Some I know in Bags End score them sadly low.

She had smiled her perfectly fine Crissy smile at me & said, "Just write your newspaper, Algernon. That's all."

And I wanted to but it seemed like I would get farther away every time I tried. I wanted to. I didn't. I wanted to even more.

I tried closing mah eyes & watching old episodes of mahself to remember & figger out how again. It didn't look hard, but I couldn't anyway. I mean, why write a rerun again? I didn't even understand that question so I couldn't answer it good.

Finally, I climbed onto Milne's Porch, into mah comfy armchair, & let myself breathe & listen. Crissy told me that last time I visited her. She smiled me & said, "4or bad dreams & stressy hours, just breathe & listen." Both. Either order. I asked.

I breathed. I listened. I listened. I breathed.

What now?

Just write it down. One word & the next. The usual way but nothing is really usual in this world. I know that even if I don't want to know it.

But how? I mean, I wish to be true to mah beagleboy journalist's heartbone, & to mah strange homeland called Bags End too.

I am but a simple beagle in this world, but I try hard when I put on mah writer's fedorah.

Then one day a black & orange Spider crawled onto mah armchair be4ore I could cry out properly & flee.

We looked at each other, & some more, & again.

"May I stay?" he asked, his glittery eyes shining at me a little.

"You're asking me? You could bite me & eat me & stay too."

"I don't eat beagles."

"O."

"May I stay?"

"I don't run things. Ask those big guys. Sheila Bunny. Betsy Bunny Pillow. Lisa Marie Chow."

"But Milne's Porch is yours?"

"I think so."

"May I stay?"

"I don't know."

I think the Spider nodded OK. He didn't go.

The Spider was from somewhere else, but he knowed about Bags End.

"I have been reading your newspaper 4or years. I like it. It's funny. Where did it go?"

I pointed at mah furry brainbone. "It got stucked in here 4or awhile, I guess."

The Spider nodded. Sort of.

I wasn't sure if it was polite but I asked.

"What's your name, guy?"

"Larry."

"Larry?"

"Short 4or Laurence."

"O. Nice to meet you, Larry."

"You too, Algy."

Algy? Hm.

We sat together a long time not talking & that was OK. I remembered Crissy's advice. Breathe & listen. Either order.

"Would you like me to take you around Bags End? I could introduce you to mah friends & all the rest."

The Spider's, I mean Larry's, diamond eyes shined. "Yes. Let's go."

Larry is a littler guy than me, & I was gonna walk real slow 4or him, but instead he crawled up on top of mah headbone & settled between mah ears. He was light & seemed comfy so I climbed with care from Milne's Porch into mah & mah brother Alexander Puppy's bedroom. Wondering what would happen next.

My silly Bumping brother wasn't around, which was good because explaining him would be harder than most others.

I figgered, OK, better just start at the top & go see Sheila in her Throne Room. So I aimed mah humble paws straight on to the level where Sheila slouches down in her Throne, crunching carrots

O! Yuk!

& listening to her jazz records.

I walked right in with Larry, ready 4or something or anything too. As much as I could.

No Sheila. No Throne. No Throne?

"I am confused, Larry. She is usually here," I said, a little upset now.

"It's OK, Algy. Show me somewhere else you like to go."

Algy. Hm. Still, a polite Spider & no biting demise to boot.

OK, then, I decided to bring him to meet mah friend Princess Crissy. She doesn't live in Bags End really, but she is mah dear one, & she doesn't ever not be there or her Thone 4or no good reason.

It took some walking, & strangely some remembering how, to get to the door to Imagianna. Too strange.

No Castle! Hey! I mean, I found the right level, & I walked with Larry straight through the door that leads from Bags End to Imagianna, & right to where Crissy's Castle is, where she lives with her friend Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, & there was no Castle. No Crissy. No Boop too.

"Larry, climb down."

"OK, Algy."

"None of this is right & I don't know what to tell you or how to explain. Everybody is missing & I don't know why." My upset was grown up bigger.

Larry's eyes glittered at me, but friendly, I liked him. And also he was all I had left right then.

"So I don't know what to do, Larry. I can't show you people & places that aren't there to be showed. Sorry, guy."

"I want to help, Algy. Maybe that's why I'm here."

"To help what? Can you make mah friends & kinfolks & others reappear? I would say wow & thankee, I promise!" My upset like a mountain now.

"Let's go back to your porch, Algy. Let's start where we began. Trust me."

I had no other bright idears so Larry got back on mah headbone & we walked through awful empty Bags End to Milne's Porch where the whole thing had started.

I crawled right into mah comfy armchair & Larry climbed onto the paw-rest near me.

"OK."

"OK."

So we just sat &, to be honest, Dear Readers, we are sitting here right now. Just me & the friendly Spider, right now.

Where did everyone go?

I don't know & I am sad. Larry isn't sad tho. I am trusting him. Larry is here.

******

Need to Find Mah Friends & Kinfolks & Others!

Your old pal Algernon sat 4or a long time without doing nothing. I got used to doing nothing in a quiet, sad sort of way. Worse than looking and not finding anyone.

Finally, mah new & only visible friend Larry the Spider told me it was time to do something again. I said "but" & "but" again, & then repeated the first one, but he was stubborn.

"We need a plan, Algy. We need to make a plan & get along to carrying it out. I am your friend & I want to help."

But I didn't know where we should go.

"I don't know where they are, Larry."

"We need to think like detectives, Algy."

Algy. Hm. "I am not Sherlock Homes, fella. I don't have a magnifying glass or a super big brainbone."

Larry laughed. "You don't know how big your brain is!"

I nodded. Or how small too.

"What matters is that you're loyal to your home & its people. Finding them is what you would do if they are lost. Every time."

Hm. This Spider was smart about lots of things, including me.

"I will try."

Larry's eyes glittered brightly. I think they do more when he's thinking hard. "I have an idea 4or you to try."

"OK."

"How long have you been writing your newspaper 4or?"

"A long time, Larry."

"And you have all of the issues somewhere?"

"Yah. In a real safe place too."

"OK. Go there & read them. Every single one. Maybe you will find a clue in them. I think it's possible."

Wow. Another smart guy idea.

"Are you going to come with me?"

"No. I am going to look around Bags End & see what I can find."

"OK." I looked at him again. Such a little guy, but smart too. I don't know how he came just when everyone else was gone but it was a lucky thing.

I left him & made mah way to mah Bags End News Vault. I fetched the key from its secret place & there I was. Inside mah Vault were lots of labelled crates. Plus there were 2 chairs, 1 4or me & 1 4or mah friend Lory Bunny, & a little purple stool on which sat mah beloved ritetyper. Ah, sad.

It's really where I am now. I have a lot of reading to do, I read slowly, & I don't know how long it will take or what I will find.

Boy, a lot of them! All neatly in notebooks & Lori labeled them 4or me too.

I really don't know but it can't hurt.

The first notebook is here with me as I finish this issue. A short one.

I am going to find my friends & I will tell about how I do & what I find out from Larry next issue.

******

Nothing Goes Away, Nothing Returns

It seems so long, Dear Readers, since I have written about mah strange but usual homeland Bags End.

First I got sick 4or a long time & was in Dreamland chasing after Benny Big Dreams 4or help & answers. I writed about all this earlier in Part 1 of this book. I made mah way through that OK after too long but then everybody disappeared! Even mah dear friend & unaccountable fan Princess Crissy was gone, & not to be found.

I had one good ally left & he was a little black & orange Spider named Larry. Larry told me to read every issue of mah newspaper to find clues & he would look all around Bags End too.

I started to. I read about elections & attacks on the Bunny Pillow Farm & lots of Bump talk. I even missed the Bump talk! Low days indeed, Dear Readers!

It didn't help. I didn't want to make Larry mad or disappointed but I only got sadder or sadder. So I stopped. Maybe another day I would come back to that Bags End News Vault & read more or even much more. But not now.

I left the Vault & walked through mah empty home. No sign of nobody. Very quiet. No tricky plans, no brawls abounding.

I found Larry in some hallway or other. I couldn't tell one from the other anymore.

He was looking up at this strange picture I had never seen be4ore. I looked quietly with him too 4or a long time be4ore talking.

The picture showed a pretty girl, taller than mah beloved & missing Miss Chris, & she was bending down to talk to some fairies.

I looked more & saw that she was in these pale-looking Woods & she was barefoot too. I looked till I felt full of looking.

"Larry," I confessed. "I didn't read every newspaper in mah Bags End News Vault. I was getting too sad & it wasn't helping us."

Larry looked at me with his glittery eyes. "It's OK, Algy. I think this picture will help."

Algy. Hm. "How, Larry?" Quiet.

"You know this place?"

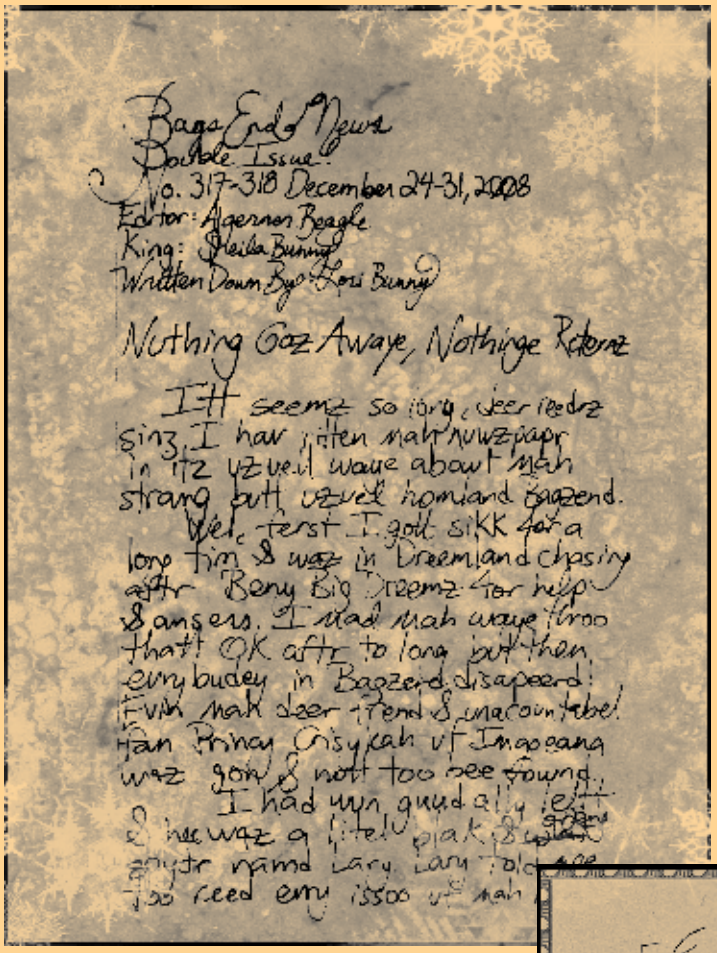
"There's more as you follow your root, Algy."

Ut-oh. "That's Dreamland? Where Benny Big Dreams lives?"

"Yes."

"Listen, fella. I had the

Midsummer Eve **by Edward Robert Hughes, 1908.**



Baga End News
Double Issue
No. 317-318 December 24-31, 2008
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Nuthing Goz Awaye, Nothinge Reterns

I-ff seemz so long, deer reedz sinz I har ¡itten nah nuwzpapr in 172 yz we-ll wave about nah strang putt uzwil homland Bagzend.

Wel, ferst I got sikk for a long tim & waz in Dreemland chasing affr Beny Big Dreemz for help & ansers. I had nah waye throo that! OK affr to long but then, ery budey in Bagzend disapeerd: Ferst nah deer frend & macoin tabel Han Prinsy Orsy kah vf Inagoeang waz gon & not too see found.

I had wun guud aly ie-ff & hee waz a litel plak & [illegible] anytr namd Lary. Lary told me too reed ery issue vf nah

Baga End News
Triple Issue!
No. 319-320-321 December 25, 2009-January 2, 2010-January 9, 2010
Editor: Algernon Beagle
King: Sheila Bunny
Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Reasun ff-Lifs in Dreemland!

O deer readerz & hear is yorz old pal Algernon riting from deepy sinsd Dreemland with I nowe no iz dipp insit thee hartz ff wun & awl who heen or liveth too thuss storge. If my werds seeme a litel tuff for yeath a hombel hello iz cuz I haventz thee hange vf Dreemland Inglish too goode yet.

Wite now thor sti iz that yor oki pall Algernon keepz a promiss even tuff that waz hord thanz to mee iz that I did not no howe too keepe it exxakley.

I waz supposd too enterr into Dreemland with frend Lery

devil's own time getting out of that place! It sticks to ya worse than grape jelly. O jelly! Yuk!"

I think Larry nodded. "Algernon," he said nicely, using mah whole name. I didn't like that. You can sometimes tell trouble coming just by names.

"I think we're in Dreamland," Larry said all quiet like villains were near trying to listen.

No. No. No. No!

"No, Larry. I figgered it out, & I left!"

"I think you're back."

"But why?"

"I don't know."

I looked at Larry closer. "Larry, do you live in Dreamland like Benny Big Dreams?"

Larry laughed. "No. I don't."

"How did you get here?"

"I don't know. I wasn't here long be4ore I met you & you looked like you were in worse trouble than me so I decided to try to help you."

"Where do you come from?"

"I don't know if it has a name exactly like your Bags End."

"But you said you knowed about me? And the usual Bags End full of mah crazy kinfolks?"

"You're famous!"

"O! Shucks!" mah modesty cried.

"So maybe I was brought here to help you?"

"That means somebody knowed I was in trouble & needed help!"

Larry nodded.

"So what do we do about this picture, Larry?"

"I think this is a portal, Algy."

Larry laughed. Nice laugh 4or a Spider. Nice Spider.

"Where does it go?"

"I think it may take you back to Bags End. Your Bags End with all of your friends. And me to my home with all of mine."

"Just like that?"

"Maybe."

"How do you know that?"

Larry's bright eyes glittered very brightly. "I have seen this picture be4ore."

"Where?"

"Where I live. I don't know if it's the same or a twin."

"Did you come . . . um . . . through it?"

"Maybe. I am not really sure."

"How do you know it will bring me back to mah own Bags End?"

"I am not sure, Algy. But I think maybe. This is the Dreamland Bags End. & that is a picture I saw in my home. It's like the two combined. So maybe if we step through it we return where we came from."

I thinked. No, Dear Readers, I THINKED.

"But why are you here, Larry? Why did Benny bring me back? When were you here be4ore?"

"We all know about Dreamland where I come from. I think he needs you. I think he needs both of us. I think he wanted us to meet."

"Why? So we could find this picture & escape again?"

"Maybe."

I thinked again but not so capitalized.

"So we can both leave right now, & go home. We're not prisoners. Or we

could stay & help him out."

"Yes, I think so."

"Should we stay?"

"I don't know."

Well, your old pal Algernon will never be mistaken 4or a brave guy but I would not want to leave someone in trouble either. I am also a little bit curious sometimes, not like the Blondys but a little bit. If Larry was right, then I could go & come back from Dreamland by mah own choice. Benny needed mah help & here was this nice guy Larry to partner with too.

I used to think I was a little guy but then not so long I decided I was more a middle guy. Middle guys don't so much run from trouble. They think, count 1, 2, 3, then stay or run.

So I looked at the picture & I looked down at Larry & I counted.

1, 2, 3.

"I thinked we need to make sure we understand Benny's deal, Larry. That we can come & go again. No tricks."

"Good thinking, Algy."

So we agreed to go back to our homelands & come back if all went well.

Not asking tho I guess he didn't need to anymore, Larry crawled atop mah headbone & was ready. "What do we do now, Larry? Close our eyes & say a spell?"

"Well, where I come from, sometimes what works is sharing a dream."

"I do that sometimes with Bags End guys. I didn't know anybody else did it."

"Sure."

"So do we gotta go to sleep now? Go to Dreamland's Dreamland?"

"Haha!" That nice Spider laugh again. "I don't know if it's like that." Larry was quiet, thinking. "No, Algy. If it's a portal we have to use it."

"How?"

"We need to enter it with all of ourselves. I know it looks like a picture but it's a door. We need to learn how to walk through."

"Learn how to walk through a door? Hm."

"Yah. Hm. It sounds silly but remember this is Dreamland. And this is a door in Dreamland. We can do this, Algy!"

Well, Dear Readers, at this point I figgered, OK, why not? I was in Dreamland, but was I dreaming? Was there a sleeping Algernon back in mah own Bags End? Or was I like Benny & living in Dreamland right now? Was anyone dreaming me right now? Was I part of Larry the Spider's dream? Would I disappear when he woke up in his home? Where would he go when I woke up?

"Algernon, wake up!"

"Wake up, you stwupid bweagle!"

"Your King orders you to wake up!"

"Bump! Bump!"

"Alexander says, 'please wake up, dear brother!'"

I opened mah eyes & there I was in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch & there was a whole slew of mah crazy kinfolks, big & small, looking at me!

Well, here I was. Everyone looked familiar & talked familiar.

I looked from one face or sorta-face to the next & 4or a moment they were quiet & waited 4or me to talk.

"I guess I am back," I said. Nobody talked. Maybe confused because where I had been?

"But Benny Big Dreams needs mah help again too."

Betsy Bunny Pillow stared at me dourly with her not-face. "Help to what?" she whispered harshly. "Yell help & run away?" Then she laughed

meanly.

Sheila didn't laugh. "I have never been sure of Benny. Strange. Has a plan of his own."

I nodded. "That's 4or sure. But I am going to help him with mah friend Larry."

I could see that Sheila was getting bored with being concerned 4or me. She mumbled something about being careful & jazz appointments.

Since this was the real Bags End, or as real as it got, I figgered firstly that Larry was right & that picture was a portal to & from Dreamland. I hoped Larry made it OK to his home too.

But now I had another question to answer. Where was the portal on this side? I had come out asleep in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. So I dreamed mah way back.

I guess I should have figgered. What other way? But then again I used to wake up from dreams, not go through portals!

Well, OK, so mah mere brainbone had figgered all this much.

So I guessed there was nothing else to do but go back to Dreamland & find that nice guy Larry, & we would figger what help Benny Big Dreams needed.

I did not go right away, I have to confess. I went to sleep at nights but I held back. I know how. It's like not looking at something but sorta sideways. I was near Dreamland but not in. No looser dreams.

Days come & gone. I kept not going. Kept dreaming sideways.

Finally I decided to go to see mah dear friend Princess Crissy in Imagianna. She would smile & listen & still like me no matter mah strange story.

I found Imagianna on the usual level of Bags End, & through the usual doorway. And after awhile of walking, there was her usual Castle & the usual Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, saying hello to me.

"Hi Boop! Can I see Princess Crissy?" I said in mah friendly Algernon way.

He smiled & said yes, like I knowed he would, but I knowed too that there would be what Crissy calls protocols, which means doing things in the same way with lots of little steps. He's OK, sayeth me.

"Presenting to her most Royal Highness, Princess Crisakah of Imagianna, the visiting journalistic dignitary, Algernon Beagle of Bags End!"

Princess Crissy was sitting in the Royal Throne Boop had made 4or her, wearing her Princess dress over her blue jeans & sneakers. After I bowed, & she bowed, & Boop was all happy with all these bowings, she hugged me regular & we walked outside to talk.

"Algernon, did you ever wonder about the rest of Imagianna?" Crissy asked with her beguiling Crissy smile.

"Rest?"

"Yes. I mean, you know me & Boop & our Castle. And how to get here from Bags End. But what about the rest?"

"What rest, Crissy?" I asked, like repeating with more words involved was saying something new.

Crissy stopped & looked at me both smiling & not.

"Tell me, Crissy."

"I know Benny Big Dreams."

"You do?"

"He's not far from here."

"He is in Dreamland, Crissy."

"Yes." She smiled & not-smiled again weirdly.

She pointed. "Dreamland is that way. A long walk past that hill."

"It's a place you can point to? I have to dream to get there!"

Crissy nodded. "This is another way."

"Are you saying Dreamland is inside Imagianna the same way Imagianna is inside Bags End, Crissy?"

"Not the same way, but yes, Algernon."

There was an oak tree where we sat sometimes. Crissy would hold me in her arms & scratch mah nozebone or mah earbones. EXXSTASIS.

"I don't remember how long we've been sitting under this tree, Crissy."

"Today?"

"No. Other times too."

"Well, in some ways, we're always sitting here, Algernon. Just like this."

"You mean in nice memories?"

"No."

I stood up in mah shortness.

Crissy laughed. "I guess that's Benny talking."

"Benny isn't here!"

She smiled at me. "I think he is, or maybe wants to be."

"Can I get to Dreamland this way, Crissy? I mean, I would be awake, not asleep in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. Is this mah portal like Larry has that picture?"

"I think so, Algernon."

"And then I could come back by that picture or by Imagianna?"

Crissy almost nodded, then didn't.

"What?"

"I don't know 4or sure."

"You're always sure, Crissy!"

She looked almost sad, a very strange face 4or her. "It's not a sure thing in Dreamland."

I thinked about this, then nodded too. She was right.

"I guess I should go. That way."

Now Crissy smiled again. "OK, Algernon."

"Want to come?"

"I can't."

"Why?"

Crissy nodded & smiled again but talked no more. We hugged & she left me then. Sometimes, Dear Readers, no words. No words at all.

So it was up to me & what bit I knowed of braveness. Benny Big Dreams needed mah help again & this time I wasn't going by trick, trap, or nightmare.

Nope. I was going & I would find mah friend Larry & tell him I was satisfied about the coming & going.

Usually Bags End grand adventures are led by some big guy like Sheila Bunny or Betsy Bunny Pillow. Usually there is a whole lot of us going together.

Just your old pal Algernon this time. I thinked to mahself as I pushed mahself along, "I could use a oldfashioned grand expedition right about now, even the ones I didn't like & protested."

I didn't know what was next, but it was time to go back into Dreamland now.

******

Season of Lights in Dreamland!

O Dear Readers & here is your old pal Algernon writing from deep inside Dreamland which I now know is deep inside the heart of one & all who hear or listen to this story & if my words seem a little tall 4or such a humble fellow it's cuz I haven't the hang of Dreamland English too good yet.

What's truer is that your old pal Algernon keeps a promise when made & what was hard this time is that I did not know how to keep it exactly.

I was supposed to enter into Dreamland with mah friend Larry to help Benny Big Dreams with his troubles.

Benny Big Dreams is a strange guy I know who lives in Dreamland, which is a strange place too. Even stranger than Bags End, mah beloved homeland. O! Lost!

What I found out pretty quickly is that Dreamland had somehow changed. It was sticky be4ore, which is why I had tried so hard to leave, but now I had come to it on mah own to help Benny. I could see why he needed our help.

Dreamland was dark & troubled by the world outside. I knowed this cuz when I finally found Larry the Spider he told me so.

"What do we have to do?" I asked, figuring a couple of magickal words weren't going to be enough.

"We must trans4orm ourselves willingly, & 4or years, & wait 4or a chance moment!" Larry cried with his eyes glittering crazy.

Ut-o.

I nodded & all around us got crazy 4or awhile, but then we found ourselves clear again. In a really crammed place. With lots of other guys who were't moving or talking none. Ut-o 2.

Well, your old pal Algernon knows that, in a tight spot, you gotta keep kicking till something gives way. I yelled, "Kick, Larry!" & we kicked & kicked till we saw light, & pushed our way out of that dark place.

Into a bigger dark place. All dusty looking. Hm.

"Hm," I said aloud too, hoping Larry would say back something far smarter than me.

Larry looked around in his glittery-eyedness & thin legs & smart scrawny ways, & said, "We have a long way to go, Algernon."

"To get where, Larry?"

"Dreamland is dusty & unused, like this room. We have to shake up the dust!" & with that he scampered to a crack in the wall, & poked his way on through.

Now I would never have thought that as big a nozebone as worn by your old

pal Algernon would have fit through that crack, but push & push & push some more, & it did! I yelled in triumph, & then fell down a long flight of stairs nearly to my doom.

Larry pushed something soft 4or me to crash on at the last minute, & I almost thought it was pillow-like, & yellow, but crash, tumble, & suddenly Larry had us running with all our mights to leave the prison we were in 4or good!

Snow. That's what we come to outside. Lots of snow & pale-looking trees. I thinked this meaned the Season of Lights like I have told of in other Bags End Books, but I could not rightly remember it too good. Which would have made me sad but just then I heard the nicest laugh, all gruff & charming.

"What do we have here?" asked the black & white bear with the purple bow tie same color as Sheila Bunny's eyes. O! Lost!

"This is Algernon, the great writer of Bags End News!" cried Larry.

"O! Shucks!" cried me in reply.

"And this is my good friend Bauer the Bear!" said Larry all happy.

Bauer laughed & proceeded to do a little dance that ended in a sort of slide. It was like a step-step-step-slide back!

I clapped mah paws at such talent & we were all good friends from then on.

Well, us friends found ourselves walking a long road in snow time & who knows how long ever on when up rolled a red & yellow Truckee as handsome as you please, & we piled in the back to make quicker along our way.

Fastfast went that Truckee, but what I kept seeing amongst the pale-looking Woods on the side of the road made me ask the Truckee to slow & stop please. It was a white flash but it was gone when we slowed. So we speeded up again, & there was that flash again, but I could not get a look rightly at it.

"Truckee, speed up!" Larry cried in his smartness.

That's when I saw the White Bunny. Now let me tell you, Dear Readers, I know Bunnies very well but I did not know this Bunny. The faster we went, the clearer she got in our view till I got a stray smart guy idear & yelled, "Jump into the Truckee!"

And she did! She & that Bauer fella seemed the best of friends & did some kind of dance with hoppings & slidings in it, which I liked, but then I worried if we slowed down the Bunny would go away, Poof!

But that didn't happen, because it seemed like the Truckee was took in by these Creatures who looked like Bees, who sort of buzzed & flied us up into the air to ride along even faster. I worried about stings a lot, but Larry told me these were more of his friends come to aid our travels. He sure knows a lot of good guys.

There we were, a Truckee full of friendly guys, being flied along by some

very helpful Bees, when first trouble arrived.

Trouble long in coming but always due. That's what I say on the matter.

The skies grew dark all around us, & a terrible cackle filled the air!

"HeeHeeHeeHee!" cackled this tiny little Creature, smaller than Sheila the Short herself!

Well, I could not figger out what was going on here, or why this tiny little guy was such great trouble, when she cackled louder & cried, "Dreams are the Ticket to Enter the Show!"

And be4ore I could blink twice & turn to the others 4or explanations, the air was clear & we seemed to be flying on again.

I looked at Larry & the others, & they smiled friendly at me, but I did not know if they had seen what I had just seen. I said nothing, strangely.

Eventually, it seemed the Truckee was rolling again along the road, & the Bunny & Bauer got out & danced & hopped & so on beside it as we rolled along. This seemed friendly enough.

I began to fall asleep, which I have learned is possible to do in Dreamland, but to one's own danger too.

But Larry nudged me nicely & said he would wake me when we were there. I fell asleep wondering where there was . . .

When I waked up, still in Dreamland mind you, I think, but probably, everything was different.

"We're there, Algernon!" said Larry all friendly, & I looked around me so.

We were in a place that looked like those fairy tale storybooks. Tall trees & long rivers & a big Castle in the air. None of Larry's friends were around.

"Later, Algernon," Larry said smiling, & we walked along a purple path underneath a pink sun with polka dot clouds in the air nearby.

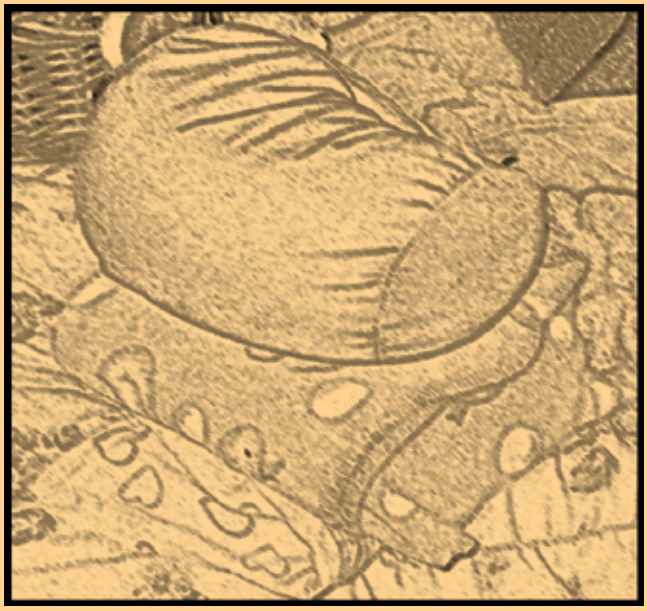
Hm.

"No, Larry. Now!" I cried this time, not knowing what I was doing, but sure enough things changed again.

We were in a dark building & I knowed somehow it was a barn. Larry looked spooked.

"It's OK, fella, but I know a thing or 2 about tricks. When the colors get too strange, it's time to start fussing!" I said & I did not know me 4or sure 4or a moment there.

Then there was a black & white doggy who came up to us, all tail-wagging friendly. He didn't talk like your old English-spouting pal Algernon, but he



did friendly tail-wagging lead us to a deep scary well, & we knowed we had to go down it.

O.

Well, there was a bucket & a rope & so that was nice as I lowered us paw over paw to our probable doom in the Deep.

But then I noticed how soft the bucket we were in was &, um, yellow?

"Hold on tight!" a strange but nice voice cried in our ears & we zoomed!

Now I don't know how a bucket got soft & yellow like a pillow, or how we then zoomed! but we did, & when we arrived to where we were going, it was somewhere different 4or sure.

"Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! My friends to Master X's Creature Carnival of Wonders & Delights!"

So cried a handsome-looking white bear in a fine black hat & scarf, & so we were ushered in with crowds, crowds? crowds of others to a carnival both wonderful & delightful!

Master X made his way into the ring that was in the center of the stands where we crowds all sat in &, after more welcoming words, he introduced the first amazing act, Jumping Jacoby!

And in bounded a very nice-looking brown Monkey fella who did the most amazing jumps hi into the air, & somersaults, & flips, & all those things your old pal Algernon would have broken every bone twice over doing! But he didn't!

Then there was a black Bear who was very talented too, I must say. He did a really nice dance, juggled a few balls, told a good joke.

"What did one wall say to the other? Meet you at the corner!"

Haha! Mah kind of humor. Then he did one of those crazy end over end flips so very high into the air! & was OK not busted into many many pieces.

Well, all was going just merry & fine when the next act was that tiny little Creature from be4ore who stood her ground solidly in the ring & said, "What will you give 4or Dreams & the Dreams of all?" She then cackled in a way sorta scary but sorta funny too, & I was confused.

I was gonna ask Larry next to me, when he shooshed me softly & said, "Be ready to go, my friend!"

And into the ring flew a Bee that looked sorta familiar, like the ones be4ore, but now he was being friendly sitted upon by a nice-looking Puppy who I never saw be4ore amongst mah many Puppy knowings.

They flied impressively around the ring together, & swooped & soared, & the crowds cheered & cheered & cheered, & cried, "More!" & when they swooped

close-close to me, Larry & I heard, "Jump, beagle!" & did not need to be told twice with that strange scary funny little fella lurking around the place.

So we jumped & now we were holding onto the Bee, who seemed bigger then be4ore somehow, or be4ore that too. We were flying again through the air, far from that great Carnival. I wished them well. Just don't book cacklers when times get tough, friends.

It seemed like we might be getting somewhere finally because the air was clear, & the sky was bloo, & all was well & good until krash!

We were dropped deep in these strange pale Woods, clump!

I looked around & I found Larry & he was OK, but the Bee & the Pup were I guess long gone or something.

Seemed like a pretty creepy Woods to be dropped in, but then Larry's eyes glittered like they do, & he said, "They only came this close 4or us, Algernon."
"Where are we?"
"The White Woods."
"I can see their color, Larry!"
"Don't be scared, Algernon," Larry said, & I then realized that I was shivering with fright. How strange 4or me not to know first!
"Why are the Woods White, Larry?" I asked politely in mah mortal fear.
"They are asleep, Algernon."
I stopped. "In Dreamland?"
"You sleep here."
"Yes, but it's not a good idear. Like this Dreamland gets jealous when you have another all in your own head to go to."
Larry nodded & laughed. I don't like being right all that much. I am never right 4or the calm-day-in-the-sunshine-napping reasons.
"These trees are dreaming until the Beast wakes up again."
"Ut-o. Beast?"
"He is sleeping in a clearing shaped like a temple in full moonlight."
Of course. Like that. "Larry," I said uncertainly.
"This is why Benny Big Dreams needs us, Algernon."
"Why can't he wake up his own Beast!" I demanded all grumpy like Sheila. Almost. She would have been more grumpy, less scared, than me.
"We need to find him & go to his Dreamland to wake him up."

Boy! I was thinking I needed an abacus to keep score of all the Dreamlands that were going around.

But I sighed & nodded to Larry & we trudged through these crazy White Woods to go wake up the Beast who sleeps in the middle of the clearing shaped like a temple in full moonlight. Too crazy!

Then ahead of us appeared a purple dancing Creature whose pretty fur was just the color of Sheila's eyes, & Bauer's bow tie, & by golly if I wasn't ready to do some dancing mahself by this point! And so we followed the Creature at a quick dance, & even your clumsy-footed pal Algernon couldn't fail!

I am sure there were others along our path too. Crazy-looking bloo-eyed Kittys & troops of Dancing Spoons, & squads of little Pine Cones, & I could

almost swear there were even these little Duckees along the way as we danced! And the light in the sky grew brighter & I knowed it was a full moon, & me & Larry got ready, & there was a clearing up ahead of us, & there was the Temple, which Larry said is like a house 4or Godd to live in, & have visitors, which I thinked silly & nice both, & inside the Temple was the Beast, & into his Dreamland we danced- - - - - -

4or a long time it seemed so different I 4orgot the story line. It seemed I was back in Bags End sitting in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. Then mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy came & told me through the window in his made-up talk to come along to school. Actually I was tolded in English words I could understand by that nice guy Allie Leopard.

And then we were all at our desks in Mister Owl's School, & he was teaching us something important until--

that crazy-eyed little Creature appeared with her cackles & cried, "What will you give 4or your Dreams?"

And then I wasn't in Bags End back-when no more but Dreamland now, the clearing with the Temple like be4ore, & suddenly all was still & quiet. Both.

Now it was just me. Even Larry the Spider was not around now. I figgered he would be again at some point. Anyway.

The little Creature stood in front of me. And further back was the sleeping Beast. O.

"Will you wake the Beast behind me?" she cried & started her crazy cacklings again.

"Stop!" I cried. "No more of that!"
She stopped. Right away.
"Now let's start over. Mah name is Algernon Beagle. How do you do?"
She started to cackle when I wagged mah pawbone & shook mah headbone. "No! English."
"Rosaleeta!" she said all merry, but not cackling so OK.
"Why is he sleeping?" I asked, figgering we were making progress.

She cackled again & I was gonna get mad when I saw that her cackling was OK this time, even really, really good. She cackled soft & nicely & the Beast kinda waked up. A little more cackle, a little more wake.

"But not all. What's the rest? How do we wake him?"
The little Creature's crazy eyes glowed & she said, "What will you give 4or your Dreams, Algernon Beagle?"

Well, I had had enough. "Listen, fella, me & mah pal Larry have gone & given up all of our own com4orts to come to Dreamland to help our friend Benny, which seems to mean waking up that Beast there. All the way too."
"But Algernon--"
"I will give all! I already did! Now wake up, Beast! Wake all the way up & let me & Larry go home!"

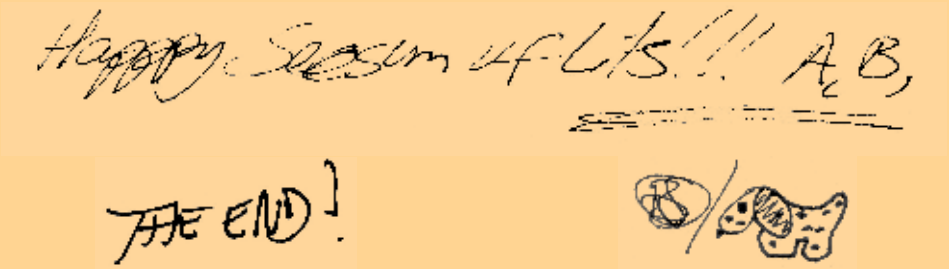
There was flashing & music & a great Beastly cry, which might have been a "thank you" or a "what time is it?" or a "how long have I been sleeping?" or "who broke my alarm clock?" or really maybe just a "thank you"
&
then there was another place where all of Larry's friends I had met & many more were gathered in a warm safe place that felt a little like Bags End itself

O! Lost!

& then there was a smile & it might have been Miss Chris's smile or Princess Crissy's or even mah own long-lost Mommy Beagle's smile

but it was a smile & a falling & a waking & mah eyes opened & there I was in Bags End 4or real I knew it in mah heartbone's own heartbone 4or real

--& I was in mah own comfy armchair on Milne's Porch on a sunshine day
--& there was mah own brother Alexander Puppy. "Bump!"
"Time 4or school, Algernon!" said Allie Leopard, all language-knowing friendly.



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T.S. Eliot

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

[Classic Poetry]

Originally published in Prufrock and Other Observations, *1917.*

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.
—Dante

(If I thought that my reply would be to someone
who would ever return to earth, this flame would
remain without further movement; but as no one has
ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true,
I can answer you with no fear of infamy.)

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
  So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
  And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
It is perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
  And should I then presume?
  And how should I begin?

* * *

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

* * *

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
  Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
  That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
  "That is not it at all,
  That is not what I meant, at all."

* * *

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

* * * * * *

Rebecca Coxon

I Took Psychedelic Drugs on a Self-Help Retreat, and This is What I Learned

[Essay]

Published at HuffingtonPost.com on December 18, 2018:
https://tinyurl.com/c106coxon

i.

After sipping a sour-smelling tea, we lie down on mattresses, wrap ourselves in blankets and don eye masks. It's like some kind of bizarre adult sleepover—except it's midday on a Friday afternoon, and from what I've been told the next six hours could unfold into one of the most profound experiences of my life.

These days, it may not sound unusual for a 20-something to sign up for a four-day retreat with fifteen strangers in a foreign country to embark on a journey of "self-discovery." In fact, it's probably a very millennial thing to do. This particular one had all the expected components: meditation, dancing, singing around a fire, breathing workshops . . . and a whole day dedicated to drinking a tea infused with magic mushrooms.

I'm kidding. They weren't magic mushrooms, they were "magic truffles," an underground part of the psilocybin mushroom that, curiously, has not been banned by Dutch law, which means that, along with cannabis, you can legally buy them in shops on the high streets in the Netherlands.

The retreats are run by the UK Psychedelic Society in the Netherlands and, as a filmmaker, I was participating for the purposes of research for a documentary about whether psychedelics can be an effective form of therapy.

Arriving in Amsterdam on a sunny afternoon, I met up with the group and was immediately taken aback by how many different accents I could hear. Compared to stories of plane journeys with multiple changeovers, my delayed four-hour Eurostar trip from London didn't seem so bad. We each bought two packs of vacuum-packed brownish blobs called "High Hawaiians" before heading to the retreat venue in the luscious Dutch countryside.

Sandwiched between several days of preparation and integration, the actual psychedelic experience takes place on Day 2. On the first day, participants meet and take part in exercises that gently, but thoroughly, prepare us for the enormity of what we are about to experience. We talk about our "intentions" for the trip, which range from pure curiosity, improving creativity, being a better parent, to grappling with heartbreak, loneliness, or coming to terms with a traumatic childhood.

A morning movement workshop, individual check-ins, delicious vegan food, and a sacred sage ceremony soon lull our anxiousness into a sense of security and safety. We are ready to take the "plant medicine."

ii.

Fifteen minutes after gulping down the psychedelic tea, my eyes start streaming. I suddenly have no control over my tear ducts. Everyone else looks calm, but gradually emotions erupt and spread

like dominoes on fire. People are laughing, crying, snorting, shaking. My heart beats rapidly, and my body temperature drops. I am a shivering, sobbing mess. Fortunately, the facilitators sense when someone needs reassurance, a hug, a blanket, or food, and serenely float around the room helping us throughout our journeys.

A specially curated playlist reverberates loudly on speakers, encouraging us to experience a range of emotions. It feels like a rollercoaster of existential purging, and isn't long before I cannot differentiate the music from myself—however odd that sounds. We are the same. Later, I could see the music in front of me as a physical thing: a bright yellow synaesthetic web of intricate pulsating patterns. I was entranced with delight and awe.

But before that there were moments of deep reflection and sadness, including a piercing realization that my family's and my own time on this earth is limited. I saw a cartoon cutout world of my childhood home from a bird's-eye view. Time swallowed the house, papering it over with trees, ignorant to my happy memories or the significance of it being my own roots. It seemed Nature was reminding me of its omnipresence and ability to exist with or without us.

Next was the experience of death—or rather, being engulfed by the universe and no longer existing in bodily form—while simultaneously feeling unified with everything. This experience of confronting one's own mortality is common in situations like this, and is one of the reasons psychedelics have been used in trials to help end-of-life cancer patients come to terms with their terminal diagnosis.

I lost all grasp of time: a minute felt like hours, the days of the week were nonsensical words. I realized that, actually, I did not exist before this. I couldn't fathom how I was going to make a documentary that portrayed this experience or, indeed, go back to work at all. *What even was my life?* What was "life" as a concept at all?

I wondered how anyone had ever jumped off a bridge or balcony on this drug. Just sitting up took an inordinate amount of mental and physical strength. I sensed that my bladder was full and heaved my body to the bathroom with the help of a facilitator. I looked in the mirror and saw myself with gray hair—as an old lady. Then a baby-faced reflection—myself as a child. I giggled. *What was my mind trying to tell me?*

Back in the room, I sat down and closed my eyes. This time revealed a vast expansive vision of delicate glass flowers in a white room. Each flower represented a living person, each one so unique and fragile. It reminded me that everyone is intrinsically valuable, and that vision remains one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed.

Crucially, the days following the ceremony are dedicated to helping make sense of our trips, and developing tools to positively integrate the experience into our daily lives. We hug, we walk in the woods, we write, we sing, we laugh, we cry, and we share our deepest secrets. We have been to infinity and back together. Having been strangers just 36 hours ago, we are now firmly cemented into the fabric of each other's lives.

iii.

These isolated visions will not change your life; action is required for change. But they might ignite something within you, and for people with a mental illness that could be a lifeline. For people like my brother, who has suffered with severe OCD and depression for the best part of a decade, it could be an exciting alternative treatment option.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States has recently granted "breakthrough therapy" status to psilocybin (the psychoactive compound in magic mushrooms / truffles) which should accelerate research for treating conditions such as PTSD and depression. And with clinical trial results looking very promising so far, some U.K. scientists predict that psilocybin-assisted therapy could be a part of the National Health Service as early as 2021.

I remember telling myself during my trip that only those who *really need* to do this should do

it. The first half of the experience was more intense, overwhelming, and confusing than I could possibly put into words. That's also the reason many believe it could be helpful for those suffering with certain mental illnesses; it gives you a radical new perspective and breaks your habitual patterns, even if just for a few hours. This could be transformative for someone locked in the negativity of his or her own mind. It is important to note, however, that psychosis-based conditions should not be combined with psychedelics, as they could do more harm than good.

Drugs are readily associated with addiction, and it's easy for some to park psychedelics in that group too. But from personal experience, talking to neuroscientists, and filming other people's journeys, it doesn't seem to me to be an experience that one rushes back to. In fact, rather ironically, scientists are now experimenting with psychedelics to *treat* addiction. What's more, a euphoric "high" is not guaranteed, nor is it the kind typically associated with other drugs such as cocaine or heroin. Psychedelics are also generally inconveniently time-consuming affairs, with "journeys" brought on by substances such as ayahuasca and LSD lasting up to 15 hours.

For me, the experience has helped me to appreciate what I have and develop a deeper gratitude for it. When I went on to film the retreat the following month for my documentary, there were varying experiences. One attendee described it as "one of the best things I've ever done," while another admitted that her life had been "shattered and turned upside down" by the experience. She had expected to come out "totally healed" of her problems, but soon realized that isn't quite how it works. The problem, or perhaps advantage, of psychedelics is that they are so wildly unpredictable. You simply don't know what they will offer up—or, indeed, how you will react to any insights that arise from the pits of your subconscious.

Retreats like the one I experienced are popping up all over the world, and appealing to societies that are increasingly feeling disconnected, hopeless, and fearful of each other. Coupled with health services that struggle to penetrate mental illness with any meaningful force, it's no wonder that people are deciding to take their mental health into their own hands.

Fittingly, for an experience that seems to connect random people so immediately and deeply, the breadth of human experience is truly witnessed at retreats like this. A broad spectrum of ages, religions, colors, cultures, genders, and professions undertake the same journey under the same cozy roof. It almost makes me wonder if every war and conflict in the world could be nullified by gathering leaders into a room and connecting them through a psychedelic experience in this same way. But then I remind myself that this overly idealistic way of thinking is perhaps one of the reasons psychedelics were banned in the 1960s . . .

For me, the experience can be described as like looking down the barrel of your whole life—not in a linear, photo album kind of way, but more like a scattered scrapbook of your fears, hopes, and hard truths. For some people, that will be appealing and feel necessary for healing. For others, it will sound like a nightmare.

Psychedelics may not be the "magic pill" for mental illness, or the "cure" for a sick society that many of us are desperately hoping for, but it is impossible to deny their power. And with great power comes great responsibility.

* * * * * *

Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Labyrinthine
[a new fixtion]

"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

cxxi.

A month passes, resume. *A month, really?* A month. Resume

My old college town, down here for an annual visit, three days of writing, & editing, & music on Polly iPod. No 'net. Much more lo-fi than usual.

Mac-Donald's, a shroomy mix on the Greyhound getting down here today. *Cenacle* 105 work, hours today at *History of Scriptor Press*, up to mid-2011, & me reading *Cenacle* | 78 | June 2011.

Reading its *Labyrinthine* pages, written I'm pretty sure in 2008, maybe into 2009, mostly in Portland, Oregon.

Dylan. Maya. Bowie. Global Wall & his girls. Enjoying it all.

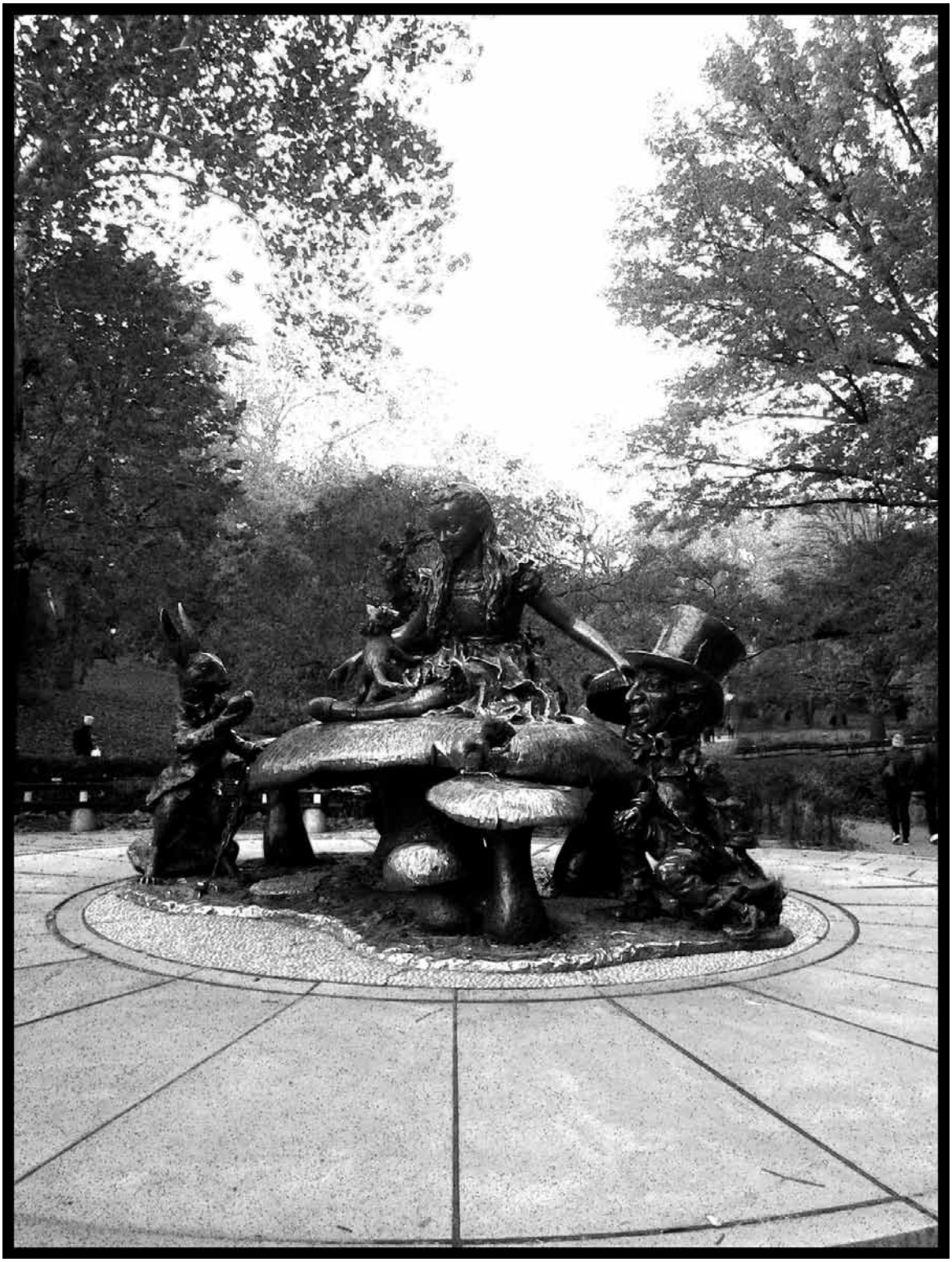
Someone said to me, "Don't you want to heap up your writings into a book?"
I said, "I do. Four times a year. With others. Call it *The Cenacle*."

That's funny. There's the *Lx* of this notebook & two others. A multi-volume book. But then there's how it passes into *The Cenacle*, back to '95 so *Why?* too, *Things Change?* & a few before that.

It's a novel realization, a new idea-toy—I like it.

There'll be more pages this weird retreat of mine—some like this, some the current stories—

Just to begin. A month away. These lines will arrive typed to *Cenacle* | 106 | December 2018. Read



aloud at the 30th anniversary Jellicle Literary Guild. How 'bout that.

Halloween decorations up here.
Spiders. Pumpkins. Skulls.
E.S.T. weirdly wonderful jazz on Polly iPod. *Tuesday Wonderland*.

Said to myself today Monday till arrive back Boston evening Thursday, just write & edit & proof & listen to music & content for SpiritPlants Radio & don't stop for these days. Your beloved safe back there. Do this & feel the elongated thrill in doing this, even the spice of doing it among these familiar old environs, blooded of loved ones, but

here I am, writing like a motherfucker

like days of old, like now, like hereon
as far as I can———

Note behind cash register:
"Upsell glazed chicken tenders"

Alright then.

Resume. I'm sitting in Wildfire Park again, old bench by its rippling pond & occasional geese, its digging grey squirrels & storms of pigeons. The trees are autumnal many-colored, orange, yellow, crimson leaves, wavering in the cool wind. This park is big, old, well-kept, a big green thing in the center of a middle-sized American city.

Startle to see Rebecca sitting next to me now. Smiling at me. Um.

"You're young."
"As are you, Raymond."
"You mean here, today, because I'm visiting this city of my birth & growing up, all the writing I did here, learning how."
"No." Her blue eyes as pretty as ever. She is as she was years long gone.
"I don't understand."
"You're like those squirrels in your writing. You leave pieces of yourself, different ages & places, waiting for you, little triggers."
"Oh."
She laughs. "I was always like this. Probably more so now."
I nod.
She mulls me, near a smirk, then stands up & before me, for me to fully regard.

Her hair is a chestnut brown, long & a bit tangled. She's wearing a few layers of shirts underneath her leather jacket. Blue jeans. Nice leather boots. I roll my eyes.

"An indulgence."

"You like them."

I nod. Hold out my arms & she's within them without hesitation, never was. She would kiss, would whatever, but I just hold her, feel her warm self, her breathing, her heartbeat. Silence a long time.

"You'll be with me today?"

She nods, smiling. I notice her art-bag slung over her left shoulder. No purse. Not her.

We sit close. Watch the water slink rippled by. All calm.

Then I notice something else, like a pattern. A cup, a small toad in it. *Labyrinthine* in my lap, of course, I double-check. Yes.

I pick up the cup of toad & hold it. Toad & I regard each other a moment. Then I nod to Rebecca to hold out her hand, & I gently tip the toad into her grasp.

"Thank you," says the toad, still regarding me.
"I should have already."
"Where will you go?"
"I'll stay with you for now."
I nod.

I start to sing the song in my head:

James—Do you like your life?
Can you find release?
And will you ever change?
When will you write your masterpiece?

We sit on awhile. Rebecca asks & the Toad agrees, & she draws his portrait in crayon & pencil, a very fine likeness, & he is well-pleased.

"I think it's time to visit the Library, Beckah & Toad," I say.
She smiles, he nods a little.

It's peaceful here, nice to have returned.
The shroom path today has been gentle.

High on desert, endless labyrinth to go.

We walk close hands clasped, Toad in Beckah's other, up to Main Street, I vaguely notice the re-done Cement Park but first to the re-done City Library.

Rather than rooms like old, each floor seems like one vast room, & it's pretty, & it's modern, & I don't like it very much. Third time I've been here since all this.

We find a table approximate to where was my table in the old Reference Room, all of it gone.

For awhile I work on proofreading *Cenacle* 105, the *Bags End Book*. Enjoy it all anew. Beckah sketches me working & then a sort of a calliope of images around her.

I'm wondering what next, & mostly at my dull & familiar thoughts when a blonde girl sits in the empty chair of our table.

Um. Jazz?
Her grey eyes glinting mischief, her skirt short, & a general feeling she's a thousand times smarter & sexier than me, I simply nod.

"Hi, I'm Rebecca," says the other smarter-than-me person present.

"Jasmine. Hi. You can call me Jazz too."
"Hi, Jazz."
They smile. Before my suddenly arrived fantasies get even *more* boring, I talk.

"Why are you here?"
She shrugs.
"This sequence seems sentimental."
She nods.
"So that's her. Not you."
"Why not both?"

Rebecca agrees. The Toad is OK by it too, I guess. Not knowing what, more so than even usual, I stand, pack my old notebooks into my old bags, & leave, expecting all will follow.

[I miss the typewriter / phonograph rooms. The wooden phonebooth. The Reference Room. The card catalogue. The sense of being hidden somewhere old & safe & smart. It's nice now. *Whatever.*]

We now come to Cement Park, a kind of secret heart to all these stories. Closed for a couple years for "renovation." Now open.

The cement floor remains.
The pilgrims statue.
The fountain is gone.
The cement bases with trees gone.

We four sit on a bench near the pilgrims. Beckah & Jazz take turns holding the Toad, who naps peaceably in whichever current girlish grasp.

They're quiet.
"Strange but pretty" Jazz offers.
Beckah chooses not to console but to do better.

"Make it your own again, in time. You can do that."

It's good advice. Mourning as a way of both loving ever on & letting go too.

I nod.
The Toad sniffs twice, says nothing, returns to nap.

OK.

I stand. "Thank you for all this."
"Don't you want to keep going?"

I look at Jazz. "Return to your narrative. I'll find you there." She nods, wicked greyeyed smile, is gone.

Rebecca's blue-eyed smile at me deciding, based on notes & potentialities. I walk over to the 15-foot-tall Bluebird Insurance "Bluebird of Happiness" statue. Toad in my hand, hops off, nudges a declivity at its base. Now a round aperture in the cement floor.

I nod to Rebecca. We three now descend together.

cxxii.

Now they are walking alongside one of the roots of the Great Tree. Kinley, Christina, Maya, & Dylan, in that order.

Again, the pursuit: *Why is there something instead of nothing?*

They are tiny on this root, like ants, moving along.

"Kinley."
"Christina."
"Is this a plan?"
"Well, it's an idea."
"An idea?"
"Or a question anyway."
"And?"
"And then something happens next."

Silence.

"Chistina."
"Kinley."
"Well."
"What? Entertain me, old man."
"It's enough. For me."
"I agree. But."
"But?"

Here Christina stops. "It's not that it's a dumb question. People have always asked it, I guess."
"But?"
"How are we answering it? How is this"—gesturing around to the sense of White Woods around them—"helping us solve it?"
Kinley stops too. Maya & Dylan too, listen quietly.
"So you want to arrive?"
Thinks. Nods. "Yes. Let's."
Nods.
"Raymond."
"I'm here."
"It's time for us to arrive."
"Where?"
"Where we're bound."
"I'm not sure I know where that is."

"Maybe it's not out here," says Dylan quietly.
"Where then?"
"Give us something to do with a who & a where & a what. Maybe it will get us to that answer."

Hm.
OK.

A classroom. Kinley the professor. Christina front row, skirt as short as her temper. Dylan & Maya in the back.

There is a TV at the front of the room showing a videotape.

The images change but what doesn't is the text near the bottom of the screen:

"Dreams Are Fragments Of Reality"

& at the top of the screen:

"Let Go & Walk On"

A story of sorts. Set in some kind of men's clothing store. Seen through the murky corner view of a security camera.

The robbers, if they be, are a tall one & a short one. The tall one an ancient soul in long moustache, long coat with its rusty medals, & something like a pirate hat on his head. Short one a crazy-eyed pandy bear in a red & orange skirt.

The store is in panic over this supposed robbery.

Kinley pressed the metallic pause button on the machine under the TV.

"Is this a robbery?"

Christina snickers, recrosses legs, flashes him for fun.

Dylan is listening quietly, glancing furtively at Maya.

Maya is sketching on her notepad a quick rendering of Rosa!eeta & Fitz on that video.

I snap my fingers & all back to the root.

"Now you have a choice. Here or there. Or maybe Maya can write your scenes for while."

Three say, "Maya." Maya, outvoted, says, "No."

cxxiii.

[In this maybe-memory, I am sitting again with my acid guru, in the living room of his old apartment, with Grateful Dead 11/5/77 Rochester, NY cassette on his stereo—"Black Peter" into "Sugar Magnolia"—his blue eyes twinkle in his brilliant ugly face—

[[There are Creatures hidden all over this cluttered room of books & LPs & old furniture, Leary & Hendrix & Einstein sharing wall space, all smiling though—they are shy but like the music—

[[[I notice on the old black & white TV in the corner a movie I wonder if I remember. Tiny little Heroes deep in the Woods of a mythical Island, looking for a Beast to help their plight—

[[[[And what is this *Labyrinthine*? What is this word "fixtion"? Can any amount of these pages *fix* anything, add aught to the world but simply more?

[[But I did not know you Creatures back when I sat in this living room with that beloved acid guru handing me an old silver pipe to puff ganja from, or a book with a tangled theory, or strumming his guitar pretty—so what this?

[[[The tiny little Heroes, six of them, are entering the Cave of the Beast now, & we follow them in, & it is not dark, & it does not seem to be a Cave at all, & no Beast is about as they stare about them at a world like & unlike what they've known—it is a dreaming world—undifferentiated—

[[Now you are sitting severally in his lap, does he assume it's the acid? They sniff friendly, & he, & he sniffs in return? White Bunny, grey Hedgedyhog, handsome black & white dancing Bear. He begins to *hmmm* to them & they join in, & the feel of this old semi-remembered room changes, a power live in it more than sentiment & affection—

[He looks at me, leaned back on the couch, *Labyrinthine* in my lap. My hand scribbling.

["Too long between drinks for you," he says quietly. "Best get to it more & fill what's dry full out. Can you do this?"

[I nod.]

cxxiv.

"Life is suffering
Tee hee, ha ha"
—Toad the Wet Sprocket,
"Little Budda"

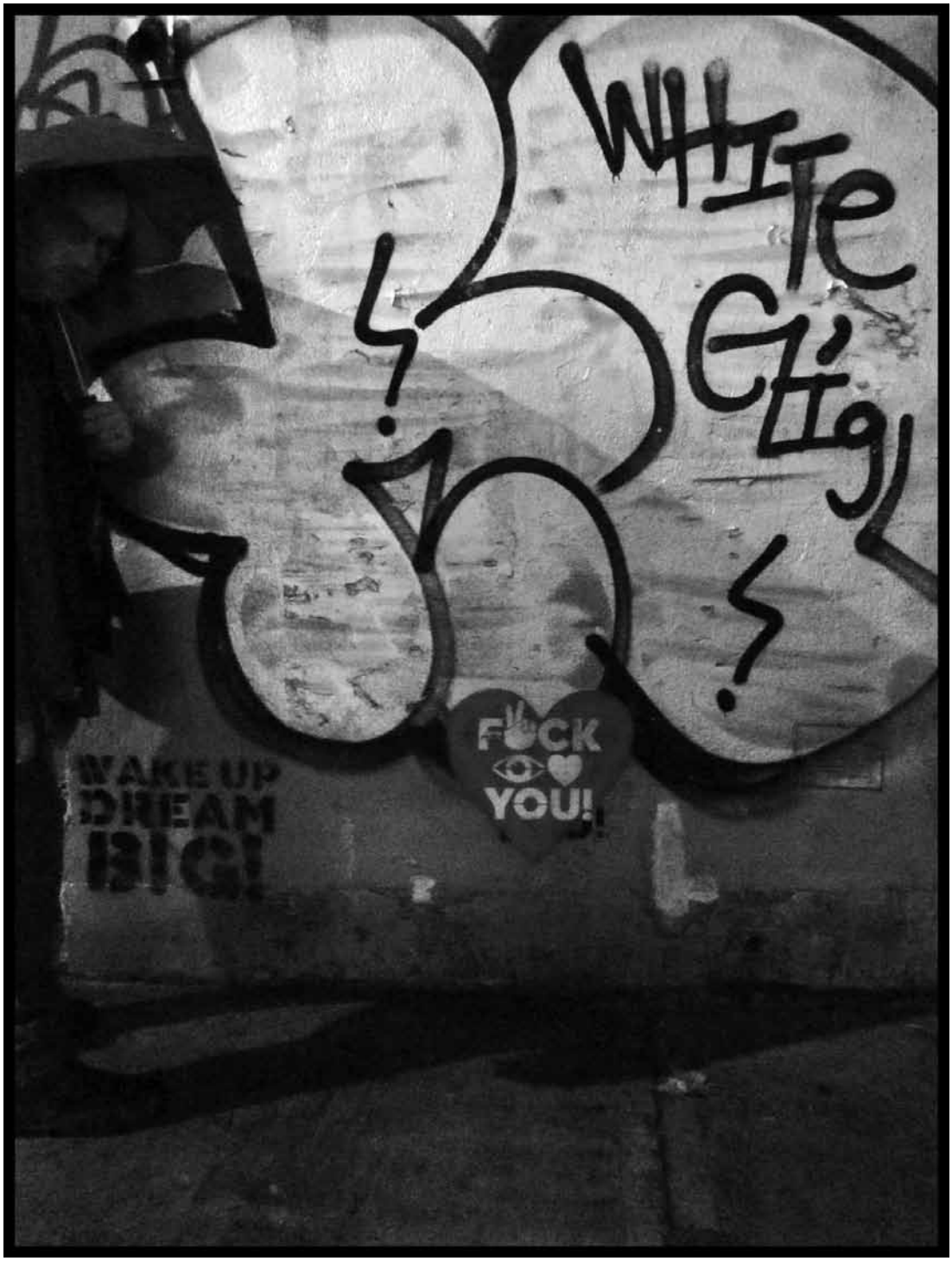
There is a film about an artist & it peers minutely & uncertainly into his life, into the moment when he painfully removes his old boots, holey socks, & pulls out his canvas & paints to render these old boots in a casual pose. *Art is everywhere. Art is everything.* "I *am* my paintings," he says.

I am sitting in this new / old writing place of mine, having seen that film earlier tonight. I am dressed in old leather & denim rags, old Lennonspecs, old notebooks, old Polly iPod, old book bags. I have now till 11 tonight, about an hour & a half, to write this thing new best I can.

Watch this bleed slowly from this here to somewhere else—just a matter of the steps, sure, unsure, sudden, melty ones.

Cold tonight, not freezing, but enough to keep me indoors here, looking window to Harvard Square—here among the leaned back talkers & many chess players.

April, youngest of Global Wall's girls, is sitting at this square white table. With me.


WHITE
WAKE UP
DREAM
BIG!
FUCK
YOU!

"Aren't you with Rebecca now?"
I nod.
"And others?"
I cackle.

"Is he going to find us soon?"
"Who?"
She glares at me. I wonder how much cuter she'd be with freckles.
"Hey!" she protests, half laughing.

"He's looking."
"For how long?"

Now all three are at this table. I wish I had a good Global Wall costume on.

They laugh. Wait.

I look at them, imagine the touch & taste of each, & in combination. This big student center lobby pretty full tables. None see the naked girls at this table. Maybe they go to Harvard across the street. Well, 1 or 2 of them at least.

"He has to go back to a gone world, a place he left long ago, Benny will take him serious if he does, & that will lead him to you."

OK, I clothed them like the girl in the K-Mart circular. I don't they care. Waiting.

Harvard Square's jangled with many strings of lights across its trees, like a low-flying Milky Way.

Waiting.

"White Woods?" asks April.
"Sort of."

Now each has a cell phone she is studying dully instead of talking with or acknowledging me.

OK OK—

"He met Benny first a long time ago, in dreams he's only just recalled, in that motel room, that strange little book he recovered from under the floor. Along with your panties."
"Whose?" they ask three as one.

I shake my head. Resume.

"Global travelled down deep in the world, down to the Deeper Deeper Sea, & came to the Great Tree at the heart of the world, & down among its roots, night after night for years, little remembering any of it on waking, until—"

"What?" they are transfixed.

"Until he came to a choice, & made the wrong one, & woke up."
"How?" demands April. The other two notice she has better luck at getting me to talk.

"His waking life. He'd become a plain, pimply teenage boy & the pain of it finally cracked his dream world. He never got back there."

"And now he *has* to go back there?"
"That's where he'll find Benny & his way back to you."

I think they are going to demand to go there too but I smile my best tricky smile & they are back to where I left them many pages ago.

I think I need to get along from here—& resume—

Global Wall has put a Do Not Disturb sign on his motel room doorknob, & also paid up most of his money cash for tonight & two more days—

Doesn't know how long this will take. Pulls curtains closed as much as they'll go. Fiddles with the white-faced pink cat radio until some thoughtful, restless jazz comes on.

The box he'd exhumed contained one more item, camouflaged to one of its inner sides.

When pulled out gently but steadily, squeezed just right, what reveals itself is a small round pill container, with a tie-dye-style cover. Inside, two pills of the most exquisite ground up psilocybin mushrooms, mixed in with a little extra something. A mix to get him deeper than he's gone in a long time.

Since back then. How he knows Benny. All he lost. And yet.

Has to drink a lot of water to get the first pill down. The second one he leaves on the brown plastic night-stand, next to the radio.

There are layers of dreaming, & it is possible to get pretty deep without committing everything to it. What Global Wall did back then was far deeper than this.

A few are able to get so deep in that their bodies are essentially left, are empty. If killed in this state, the dreaming part of them would remain alive, forever in Dreamland.

He could not get Benny to admit that this is what had happened to Benny at some point, that there was no living body of Benny's that he could ever wake up in.

But it was Benny who showed him how to get this deep, navigate, & return. Affect the waking world with things he learned—

But that wasn't really so much until later. Until Global Wall could no longer get that deep, nor remember he had ever been, *& yet* those things he learned remained to him.

He relaxed. The pill was slowly taking effect. The music on the white-faced pink cat radio was warping & warbling, changing volume at will. At least in his mind. He'd set it fairly low.

The bed was now floating, & sinking both, the room's walls trickling away until here was the full moonlit Wide Wide Sea all around him. And his bed, no craft for floating, slowly sinking down. Global relaxed, paid attention but relaxed.

The surface of the Wide Wide Sea & its dark innards were not so different, & he guessed he was sinking down now, slowly & smilingly.

Global relaxes, slows his breath, lets to the sinking in . . . but does not sink further. Water sloshes around his bed but nothing more.

Hm. *How can a vision like this stall?* It's funny. It's not.

Realizes he's gripping his little pill case fiercely tight. Clicks open the cover. One pill remains. Hm.

Pops it in like a candy. A gamble of sorts. But OK.

"TooT! TooT!" wakes Global from his drift. Pulled up alongside his half-unsunken bed is the strangest vehicle he'd ever seen. Like a weird, funny, half-imagined-impossible cross between a spacecraft & a . . . tugboat?

And its Commander. Oh, for sure, right. A crazy-eyed cackling black & white pandy bear in some kind of skirt, with a sort of Commander's headdress about her.

The second pill did it. Global nods inly that *this* is what it was like then; he'd probably met, maybe travelled with, her, her kind, countless of her.

They simply appeared, these . . . Creatures. This was their world & they would help visitors like himself. Liked to dance, sing, nap; spooked a little easy too. He did not know what they were save that he trusted them & loved them, &———

&———

This was why Maya all those later years—

She belonged to them, was of their world, at least partly, & this he felt deeper than his forgetting—

OK. She waits. Global paddles clumsily his bed closer to her Space Tugboat. Half staggers & spills over the railing that surrounds the back half of her ship, collapses onto the empty deck.

Looks back a moment. His bed is sinking now. Would never have gotten him back down there.

Now in her cabin, size between them proportioned better, him taller still, her ever the height of shortness—

Can a Space Tugboat dive underwater though? Global recalled that her kind, called sometimes imps, would not respond in words. So he had to pick his own to best effect.

"Would you bring us—" but his words disappeared inside the . . . her name . . ? *Oh. Commander Cacklebird? Close enough.* Her sudden TooT! TooT! honkings on her steering wheel, & up in the sky

arrival of a great green & gold winged Creature, a ——
——?
———?

Sea Dragon? Calgary?

Yes. Thwup! Thwup! Thwup! beat his great wings.

"Hello, my friends!" his gruff voice calls (relief that *he* speaks in words) to them. "Need a ride down deep?"

The Cacklebird cackles & TooT! TooT!s, & Global smiles too, & calls, "Yes, please. Down to the roots of the Great Tree! Can you?"

Calgary laughs a charming gruff laugh & lowers himself to accept the now rising Space Tugboat to land safely on his great green & gold-scaled back.

Once they are safely landed, the imp races impossibly fast away, & Global wonders where.

"Special tooth," Calgary explains jolly.

Oh. Global stays in the Tugboat's cabin & waits for what.

What is Calgary's sudden crying out, "Hold on tight, my friends! *Down we go!"*

Global finds himself leaning back against the cabin's wall, & the wall softening to give him a seat, & a rail nearby to hold on to. Hold he does.

Calgary sudden swoops straight up into the blue sky above & turns breathlessly to now plunge straight down. Global is terrified until the great green & gold scales rise up all around the Tugboat to cover & protect it close. Even the no doubt great sound of the plunge is a distant & unterrifying noise.

He feels completely safe, & with the crimson red & electric blue blankets now about him, only more so. And the low sweet *hmmm*ing all around & in him.

This is what it was like.
Safe. Sweet. Warm. Funny.

I didn't go back far enough, all those years I tried to.

So obsessed with unrooting the first cruel words a pretty girl said to me. So wanting to avoid *that* wound, & its path ahead.

Not back far enough. Undo a cruel word & win? *No.*

I couldn't remember all this, & I couldn't remember the wrong choice I made that woke me up that day & stripped me of this, even near to its very existence in me.

Here is where I needed to get back to.

Calgary dives impossibly fast down into the Deep Deep Sea. His *hmmm*ing calms & sweetens Global Wall's travel as much as the Cacklebird's & the Tugboat's too. They know he was here & then he wasn't. Time has not passed here in the same way, yet for people-folks it makes the heart-maps on their faces, in their bodies. They do not know the where-&-when-not-here of Global Wall, but his roughened map is plain to read as they will.

Calgary arrives the Beach & lands some distance from the ancient Sea Turtle & his people-folks friend.

Naps. His scales now tucked away again, & the Space Tugboat & Cacklebird too wait like Calgary does for their treasured Traveler to wake.

To be continued in Cenacle | *107* | *April 2019*

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. He recently wrote to me the following wise wisdom: *"Comfort is the death of creativity.* Shut off your heat and break your toilet. Causes great insight." More of his writings can be found at http://therubyeye.blogspot.com.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. This issue, however, is the first to feature his fiction. "The Country Singer Wants to Die" is excerpted from his novel *A Song Without a Melody*, published by Hyperborea Press in 2016.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html.We've been recently scheming about collaborating on a second book of his poetry.

Rebecca Coxon is a documentary filmmaker, writer and mental health campaigner.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at http://electrolounge.boards.net/. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, & died in London, England in 1965. He is rightly considered one of the 20th century's greatest poets. Scriptor Press published the poem in this issue as a single volume as part of the 2001 Burning Man Books series.This volume can be found online at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She likes to bring new issues to read on train rides, & "retreat from those coughing & sneezing around me." Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His piece in this issue is adapted from some of his writings & commentary at http://electrolounge.boards.net/. He is one of the most prolific posters to the Forums! Jimmy's most recent book, *Nonlocal Nature: The Eight Circuits of Consciousness,* was published by New Falcon Publications in 2017.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle.* He has just published *Gateway Mexico: Adventures of another gringo who wanted to be a shaman (Nightime Daydreams Book 1)* in November 2018. It can be found online at: https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07KY37T7C/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_tkin_p1_i0. Congratulations, Nate!

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He wants to live in Florida, but keeps writing poems in the cold of New England in the meantime. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. His poetry keeps getting better & better.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent monthly poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). She is somewhere in the Georgia mountains tonight, I hope singing & laughing.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. I am glad this makes her happy. Her recent book of poetry, *Never Completely Awake*, was published by Deer Brook Editions in 2017. More of her writings can be found at: https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com.

Diana Rosen lives in Los Angeles, California. Her poetry is a welcomed new addition to *The Cenacle*. Her poem "Bus Stop Story" was previously published in *Dime Show Review*. She tells me she "segued from journalism to poetry because it requires the concision of news writing, yet allows for the occasional flamboyant adjective." Thank you, Martina, for recommending Diana!

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Tells me he's still in there swinging. Good to hear!. His newest book of cowboy stories is called *Between Mountain and River,* published in 2018 by Pocol Press.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. 36 love epistles would not be enough by about 1/bajillion.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Happy Season of Lights!

Abdon Ubidia was born in Quito, Ecuador in 1944. He is considered one of the most representative and relevant voices of modern Ecuadorian literature. His story in this issue is from *Time: Philosophical and Scientific Fictions*, published by El Conejo in October 2018, & translated by Nathan D. Horowitz.

* * * * * *

"Where one door shuts,
another opens."
--Miguel de Cervantes,
Don Quixote, 1605.